

1 & 2 Kings

Originally in the Hebrew Bible the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings were two books called *Samuel* and *Kings*. The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) was the first to divide the books into four books. The Septuagint translators titled these books *1-4 Kingdoms*. That division has persisted ever since. The titles *1-2 Samuel* were given to *1-2 Kingdoms*, while the titles *1-2 Kings* were given to *3-4 Kingdoms* by Jerome in his Latin translation, the Vulgate (late 400s AD). This shows that the original authors, editors, and translators did not see these books as four separate books but rather a closely linked, multi-volume book.

The first word of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers has a prefix—the Hebrew letter *waw*. This is called a *waw*-consecutive, which creates a conjunction with the meaning of “and” or “and the.” This means that they were meant to be read as the sequel to Genesis—and sequentially from there. Conversely, the book of Deuteronomy does not begin with the conjunction *and*, while the books of Joshua through Kings do begin with the conjunction *and*. Thus, Genesis through Numbers are linked together and tell of Israel outside of the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is the bridge between Israel not being in the land and Israel being in the land. In the same way, Joshua through Kings are linked together and tell about Israel in the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is the beginning of what scholars call the Deuteronomic History, which includes the books of Deuteronomy through Kings.

Who authored the book of Kings and when are not known. Authorship is traditionally credited to an individual in the exilic period that recorded the history of the monarchies in his own time. Different parts of the book of Kings were gathered from different sources into a final narrative story. The account of King Jehoiachin’s (last king) release from Babylonian captivity (2 Kgs. 25:27-30) points to a date of final composition sometime after that event. The final editing was probably made no later than the 539 BC, which is when the people of Israel returned to the Promised Land.

Setting

The book of Genesis tells of the creation and fall of humanity and their need for redemption. Thus, Yahweh called Abraham out of all the nations in order to make him into a great nation, give him a land to dwell in, bless him, and be a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:1-3). The book of Exodus tells about how Abraham’s descendants had become a great nation but were enslaved in Egypt. Yahweh then raised up Moses to deliver Israel out of Egypt in the exodus and led them to the Promised Land. In the wilderness Yahweh gave Israel the Law, the tabernacle, and the sacrificial system so that they would be able live righteous lives, worship Yahweh, and be a blessing to the nations that surrounded them.

The book of Joshua tells of Israel’s successful conquest of the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Joshua led Israel in conquering the major cities and subduing the land. It was now up the individual tribes to settle their allotted territory and to finish the conquest of Canaan within their specific boundaries. The book of Judges tells of the following generation’s failure to finish the conquest and their eventual oppression at the hands of the Canaanites. The final chapters of the book of Judges ends with the statement: “In those days Israel had no king, and everyone did as he saw fit.” This conveys the idea that if Israel had the ideal king of Deuteronomy 17:14-20, it would not be in the state of moral decay that it was now in.

The book of Samuel tells how some semblance of law and order was restored through the leadership of Samuel and David. The book of Samuel records Israel's transition into a monarchy and focuses on David as the true king of Israel. In 2 Sam. 7:10-13 Yahweh made a covenant with David, in which He promised that David's line would continue forever and he would always have a descendant on the throne of Israel.

The book of Kings continues the story with the transition of kingship from David to his son Solomon. As a result of Solomon's idolatry, Yahweh took the kingdom of Israel from him. However, because Yahweh made a promise to David that he would always have a descendant on the throne, He allowed David's family line to keep one tribe. Thus, the nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms. Israel became the northern kingdom, consisting of the ten northern tribes and the tribe of Judah became the southern kingdom. The book of Kings then tells of the moral decay and rebellion against Yahweh of both kingdoms, and their exile as a result of their sin. The historical period of the book of Kings covers about 413 years (971-560 BC). The events that frame this period were Solomon's coronation as king over Israel (973 BC) and Jehoiachin's release from prison in Babylonian exile (560 BC).

Structure

The first part of the book of Kings tells of Solomon taking the throne of Israel and building the temple (1 Kgs. 1:1-11:43). Though Solomon started off well he eventually fell away from Yahweh. The second major part of the book of Kings tells of the kingdom splitting as result of Yahweh's judgment for Solomon's idolatry. The kingdom split into Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom). The book of Kings continues to record the histories of the Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom) as they fall into moral and political decay. During this era of 209 years (931-722 BC) the two kingdoms experienced differing relations with one another. For 57 years (931-874 BC) they were antagonistic (1 Kgs. 12:1-16:28). Then for the next 33 years (874-841 BC) they were allies (1 Kgs. 16:29—2 Kgs. 9:29). Then in the final 119 years (841-722 BC) they were antagonistic towards each other against (2 Kgs. 9:27-17:41).

Purpose

The purpose of the book of Kings is to explain how the chosen people of Yahweh ended up in exile. It is clear from the prophetic books that many Israelites never thought that Yahweh would ever bring judgment on them since He had promised to give them the Promised Land and dwell with them. Now in exile, many of them were asking the questions, "How this could happen to us?" and "How could Yahweh violate His promises?" The answer that the author gives in the book of Kings is that the people of Yahweh forfeited the promises of Yahweh because they refused to submit to the will of Yahweh as spoken through the prophets of Yahweh.

To make this point the author tells the story of the failure of the kings of Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom) to obey Yahweh, abstain from idol worship, and rule justly over their kingdoms. Deuteronomy 27-28 made it clear that even though Yahweh had promised His people the land of Canaan and fertility in the land, this was dependent upon their obedience to His Laws. Their failure to do so would bring famine, plagues, invasions of other nations, and eventually exile from the land. However, Yahweh's faithfulness to His people shows that though the people deserved to be in exile, Yahweh would honor His promises to never abandon them and bring them back to the Promised Land one day.

The author's evaluation of the prophets, kings, and Israel is not kind. He highlights their faith and obedience but does not shy away from their failures and disobedience. No one escapes his harsh critique for it is Israel's sin that lead to the exile. But one has to have knowledge of the Deuteronomic Law, for his critique is subtle using allusions to Deuteronomy rather than directly stating their sins.

Themes

There are four major theological themes that stand out in the book of Kings and that develop the reason that Israel went into exile.

The Requirements of the Deuteronomic Law

The book of Deuteronomy clearly revealed what it meant to live righteously in the Promised Land and what would happen if Israel did not. Of great importance are the regulations concerning correct worship of Yahweh under the covenant (Deut. 12:5; 16:5-6). Specifically, Israel was to worship only Yahweh (Deut. 5:6-10) and only in the tabernacle and later in the temple (Deut. 12). The Israelites were commanded to tear down all the high places (altars built to gods on hills) and never worship other gods or even Yahweh there (Num. 33:52; Lev. 26:30; Deut. 12:2). The author shows that king after king abandoned their covenant loyalty with Yahweh and worshiped other gods. The author also continuously states that the kings, even the godly ones, failed to tear down the high places (1 Kgs. 12:31-32; 13:2, 32-33; 14:23; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kgs. 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35; 16:4; 17:9, 29, 32; 21:3). The second major violation of the Law was Israel's lack of love and social justice concerning their neighbors. The book of Kings records countless acts of social injustice committed by the kings and the people. The prophetic books condemn Israel for this violation.

The third major violation that the author highlights is the kings' violation of the Deuteronomic regulations for the king. According to Deut. 17:14-20 there were five regulations for the king. First, the king had to be an Israelite of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, especially if his job was to represent Yahweh.

Second, the king must not accumulate horses. Horses were a symbol of military might. Egypt was a major horse market in the ancient Near East. Therefore, the king must not build a strong military, for he must depend on Yahweh for his military victory (Ex. 17:8-16). Likewise, he would be less likely to be corrupted by power and dominate others if he did not have a massive military.

Third, the king was not to have multiple wives. In the ancient Near East, kings' wives often represented treaties between nations. Each king would marry the daughter of the other king and have children with her. This not only joined the two kings together as family but also ensured that the other would not attack as long as his daughter and grandchildren were living with that king. Yahweh wanted the king to trust Him, not political treaties, for the protection of the kingdom.

Likewise, these foreign wives would bring their pagan gods into the family and tempt the king to devote himself to these gods (1 Kgs. 11:1-13). More wives meant more pagan gods. These would then influence the king and the children of the king, who would inherit the throne after the king's death (Deut. 6:4-9).

Fourth, the king was not to amass a large personal fortune. Once again, Yahweh did not want the king to place his trust in earthly wealth, rather than in Yahweh, for his security and success.

Fifth, the king was to make his own copy of the Torah and then read it throughout his lifetime. This copying of the Torah would cause him to really focus and think on the covenant of Yahweh. If the king were to represent Yahweh and His covenant, then he would have to know it better than anyone.

The point of these regulations was to limit the power of the king so as to avoid tyranny and the possibility of his assuming the Yahweh's rule over the people. Second, these regulations place upon the king the obligations to be the model Israelite of righteousness and justice.¹

All the kings of Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom) are evaluated and judged by the author and Yahweh by their obedience to the Law and the Deuteronomic regulations for the king.

The Davidic Covenant

The major sin in the time period of the judges was when the people of Israel asked for a human king like all the other nations (1 Sam. 8:7-8; 12:12-17). Despite this Yahweh choose the institution of the monarchy to work out His purposes. The faithful reign of David as king after the failure of Saul (1 Sam. 16:1-13) demonstrated what true kingship was. Even though David disobeyed Yahweh, in the end he sought a relationship with Yahweh, repented of his sins, and submitted to the ultimate kingship of Yahweh. Therefore, Yahweh made a covenant with David that his descendants would always sit on the throne of Israel (2 Sam. 7:10-16). However, Yahweh would discipline them if they disobeyed (2 Sam. 7:14) but He would never reject them (2 Sam. 7:15; 1 Kgs. 11:39).

The book of Kings opens with Yahweh's faithfulness to this covenant with the appointment of Solomon (David's son) as king after David's death. When Solomon violated the Deuteronomic Law, Yahweh took the kingdom from Solomon but allowed him to keep one tribe (Judah) because of His promise to David (1 Kgs. 11:11-13). As both the kings of Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom) continuously sinned, it was only the family dynasties of Israel (northern kingdom) that Yahweh removed from the throne and destroyed, but He allowed the family dynasty of David in Judah (southern kingdom) to continue because of His promise in the Davidic Covenant (1 Kgs. 2:33; 3:6; 6:12-13; 8:15-16, 24, 26, 66; 9:5; 11:12-13, 32, 34, 36, 38; 15:4-5; 2 Kgs. 8:19; 19:34; 20:6). All throughout the book of Kings the author compares the kings of Judah (southern kingdom) to the righteousness of David (1 Kgs. 3:3, 14; 9:4; 11:3-4, 33; 14:8; 15:3, 11; 2 Kgs. 14:3; 16:2; 18:3; 22:2). They were then disciplined according to the standard of the Law and the heart of David.

The Prophetic Word of Yahweh

The book of Samuel already made the point that true human kingship is acknowledging and submitting to the person and will of Yahweh as the ultimate sovereign authority over creation and the nations. Yahweh as king had the right to anoint whomever He wanted as human king. When they sinned, He removed them from the throne. The prophets of Yahweh were instrumental in the appointing and deposing of kings. In the books of Samuel and Kings, the

¹ See Patrick D. Miller. *Deuteronomy*, pp. 148-49.

Torah gives no direct guidance into the lives of the kings. Rather, Yahweh's will was primarily known through the prophets.

The prophet is the one who speaks the will of Yahweh to the people. He is the only one who has the right to speak the will of Yahweh to the people because he is the only human who sits on the divine council of Yahweh.² In the First Testament, the Holy Spirit did not yet indwell people because Christ's death and resurrection had not yet made this possible. Therefore, if one wanted to speak with Yahweh, he or she had to enter His presence directly. The priests were anointed (chosen) by Yahweh to maintain the tabernacle and the sacrificial system. The kings were anointed by Yahweh to administer Yahweh's will and justice on earth. But only the prophets were anointed by Yahweh to enter His presence, through visions of the divine council of Yahweh. Therefore, the prophets were the only ones who were connected to the will of Yahweh and could speak it to the king. As one who knew the will of Yahweh, the prophet also had the authority to enforce the will of Yahweh and to punish its violations. Thus, the prophet was also the guardian of the covenant Law of Yahweh with the people.

These two things were what gave the prophet the authority and insight to anoint kings, guide them, hold them in check, and judge them. Though there were prophets before the time of Samuel, with the establishment of the monarchy, Yahweh chose to also establish the prophets in a more prominent way in Israel. Thus, Samuel became the first of a more permanent office of prophet. As Israel increased in size and power, the number of prophets would grow into a guild in order to guide and hold the nation accountable. In the book of Samuel, only a few prophets were guiding Israel and speaking only occasionally to the kings. In the book of Kings there were hundreds of prophets who spoke frequently to the people of Israel. When the kings submitted to the will of Yahweh as spoken through the prophets, then Israel would function as the image of God. But when the kings rejected the prophets, the nation followed, and Yahweh sent more prophets more frequently to the people to prophecy the coming judgments (Deut. 28) over their violations of the covenant Law.

Yet the narrator of Kings begins to blur the lines between who are legitimate prophets and who are false. The narrator begins to reveal the prophets as mere men who have flaws and make mistakes, making it hard to always know what is going on. With some of them their allegiance to Yahweh is not quite clear and others blatantly disobey Yahweh. Yet the prophet was not above the Law of Yahweh either and when the prophet disobeyed Yahweh he was killed, just like Moses (Num. 20:12; Deut. 34:1-8). The kings and prophets were anointed by Yahweh to be His image, therefore they were held to a much higher standard. When they directly disobeyed Yahweh, they taught the people that this was all right. Therefore, Yahweh brought His judgment upon them for their disobedience. The book of Kings tells of many kings and prophets who disobeyed Yahweh and therefore were killed as a judgment. The narrator of the book of Kings is not kind in his evaluation of either kings or prophets.

The Judgment and Grace of Yahweh

As seen above, the theme of judgment and grace is very prominent in the book of Kings. Deut. 28:15-68 makes it clear that judgment would come upon those who were unfaithful to the covenant. The book of Kings is dominated by the judgments that came upon the kings, prophets, and the people time and time again for their disobedience and rebellion. As the historical account

² See Cory Baugher. *The Divine Council of Yahweh*, at www.knowingthebible.net.

continues, the judgments increase in severity just as Yahweh said they would in Deuteronomy 27-28. Ultimately this would end in their exile. Yet despite this, and because of His longsuffering and faithfulness, Yahweh continually showed grace to the very kings and prophets He was judging (Ex. 34:5-7). The book of Kings ends with King Jehoiachin being brought out of Nebuchadnezzar II's prison and seated at his banquet table to eat with him all the remaining days of his life (2 Kgs. 25:27-30). This shows that despite the horrible deaths and exile that Israel had just experienced, Yahweh gives a hint of hope to the future restoration that He promised through the prophets in the prophetic books.

All throughout the book of Kings there are allusions to the past exodus of Israel. Solomon and the kings are portrayed as the new Pharaoh as they rebel against Yahweh. Jeroboam and Elijah are portrayed as the new Moses as they oppose the kings. Elijah brings a plague on Israel and leaves the land, showing Israel to be the new Egypt. Elijah's exiting of the land is the new exodus. These many allusions will be discussed throughout this paper. The point is to highlight both the judgment and redemptive grace of Yahweh that was demonstrated in Israel's exodus under Moses. Yahweh is the same God as He was then. Yahweh does not play favorites, so if Israel becomes the new Egypt in their rebellion against His kingship then He would treat them like He treated Egypt (Deut. 28:27, 60). But it also highlights His promise to lead them out of exile in a new exodus.

Outline

- I. The Reign of Solomon (1:1-11:43)
 - A. Solomon's Succession to David's Throne (1:1-2:46)
 - B. Solomon Establishes His Kingdom with Wisdom (3:1-4:34)
 - C. Solomon Builds the Temple and His Palace (5:1-8:66)
 - D. The Fruits of Solomon's Reign (9:1-11:43)
- II. The Kingdom Divides (12:1-16:34)
 - A. The Reigns of Rehoboam and Jeroboam (12:1-14:31)
 - B. The Reigns of the Early Kings of Israel and Judah (15:1-16:34)
- III. The Ministry of Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:1–2 Kgs. 2:25)
 - A. Elijah Confronts the Prophets of Baal (17:1-18:46)
 - B. The Disobedience of Elijah (19:1-21)
 - C. The Disobedience of Ahab and Jezebel (20:1-21:29)
 - D. The Demise of Ahab (22:1-51)
 - E. Elijah Confronts Ahaziah (1 Kgs. 22:51–2 Kgs. 1:18)
 - F. Elijah Is Taken Away (2:1-25)
- IV. The Ministry of Elisha (3:1-8:28)
 - A. Israel Defeats Moab (3:1-27)
 - B. Elisha Takes Care of the People (4:1-6:7)
 - C. Elisha Brings Military Victory (6:8-8:6)
 - D. The Reign of Jehu (8:7-10:36)
- V. The History of Judah and Israel until the Fall of Israel (11:1-17:41)
 - A. The Reign of Joash (11:1-12:21)
 - B. The Reigns of the Later Kings of Israel and Judah (13:1-17:41)
- VI. The History of Judah until the Fall of Jerusalem (18:1-25:30)
 - A. The Reign of Hezekiah (18:1-21:26)
 - B. The Reign of Josiah (22:1-23:30)
 - C. The Final Years of Judah (23:31-25:30)

Chronology of the Kings and Prophets

United Kingdom

Saul (22-32) (1040-1008 BC)
~~Ish-Bosheth (2) (1008-1010 BC)~~
David (40) (1010-970 BC)
Solomon (40) (970-930 BC)
Kingdom Spilt (930 BC)

Prophets

Samuel

Nathan
|
Gad

Foreign Rulers

Kings of Judah (South)

Rehoboam (17) (930-913 BC)
Abijah (3) (913-910 BC)
Asa (41) (910-869 BC) *

Jehoshaphat (25) (872-848 BC) *+

Jehoram (8) (853-842 BC) +
Ahaziah (2) (842-841 BC)

Athaliah (7) (841-835 BC)
Joash (40) (835-796 BC) *

Amaziah (29) (796-767 BC) *

Kings of Israel (North)

Jeroboam I (22) (930-909 BC)

~~Nadab (2) (909-908 BC)~~
Baasha (24) (908-886 BC)
~~Elah (2) (886-885 BC)~~
~~Zimri (7 days) (885 BC)~~
~~Tibni (5) (885-881 BC) +~~
Omri (12) (885-874 BC)
Ahab (22) (874-853 BC)

Ahaziah (2) (853-852 BC)
~~Jehoram (12) (852-841 BC)~~

Jehu (28) (841-814 BC)

Jehoahaz (17) (814-798 BC)
Jehoash (16) (798-781 BC)

Jeroboam II (41) (793-753 BC)

~~Zachariah (6 months) (753 BC)~~
~~Shallum (1 month) (753 BC)~~
Menahem (10) (752-742 BC)
~~Pekahiah (2) (741-740 BC)~~

~~Pekah (20) (752-732 BC)~~

Hoshea (9) (732-722 BC)
Fall of Samaria (722 BC)

Ahijah
|

Jehu

Elijah
|
Micaiah

Elisha
|

Shishak (Egypt)

Benhadad I (Aram)

Ethba'al (Sidon)
Benhadad II (Aram)
Mesha (Moab)

Hazeal (Aram)

Benhadad III (Aram)

Rezin (Aram)
Tiglath-pileser III (Assyria)

Shalmanezzer V (Assyria)
Sargon III (Assyria)

Jonah
|
Amos
|
Hosea
|
Micah
|
Isaiah
|

Hezekiah (29) (715-698 BC) *

Sennacherib (Assyria)

Manasseh (55) (697-642 BC) +

Amon (2) (642-640 BC)

Josiah (31) (640-609 BC)

Jehoahaz (3 months) (609 BC)

Jehoiakim (11) (609-598 BC)

Jehoiachin (3 months) (597 BC)

Zedekiah (11) (597-586 BC)

Fall of Judah (586 BC)

Gedallah - Governor (3 months)

Nahum

Zephaniah

Huldah

Jeremiah

Nebuchadrezzar II (Babylon)

Ezekiel

Total years of reign ()

Reign overlaps with following king +

Godly king *

The end of a family dynasty

I. The Reign of Solomon (1:1-11:43)

These chapters resume the knowledge of the book of Samuel with David's kingship. The first focus in this division is on Yahweh honoring His promise to put David's son on the throne of Israel (2 Sam. 7:12-16). The second focus is on what kind of king would David's son Solomon be. The narrator's emphasis is on the fact that Solomon had so much more than anyone in Israel as far as the promises of Yahweh and the inheritance of David, and yet he became thoroughly corrupt. The end of Solomon's reign will begin to bring an end to the patience of Yahweh and the beginning of their downfall into eventual exile.

A. Solomon's Succession to David's Throne (1:1-2:46)

The central issue in 1 Kgs. 1-2 is the succession of David and the phrase "he/who will sit upon the/my throne" is used repeatedly (1 Kgs. 1:13, 17, 20, 24, 27, 30, 35, 46; 48; 2:19). David's right to choose the king is established by the fact that he is called "King David" (eight times), "my/our lord the king" (fifteen times), "the king" (thirty-two times), and "O king" (once). There is a fourfold reference to "King Solomon" (1 Kgs. 1:51, 53) that concludes the narrative.³ Yet David had not clearly appointed an heir. Adonijah clearly was not the choice of Yahweh, the narrator, or the prophet but it also was not clear that it was Solomon. By the end of 1 Kgs. 1 it seems that Solomon is clearly the choice but by the end of 1 Kgs. 2 the narrator reveals many flaws in his character.

1:1-4 David had become so old that he could no longer keep warm even covered with blankets. They only way to keep him warm was with the body heat of another woman. So, they found Abishag, a Shunammite, a young, beautiful (twice she is said to be beautiful), virgin to give to David to be his wife and lay naked with him in order to keep him warm. Why could not one of his wives lay with him? Why did she have to be young, beautiful, and a virgin?

This was a virility test. The world's definition of manhood is the ability for conquest in the battlefield (athletics or business today) and sexual prowess. David was no longer able to fight so if he was no longer able to sleep with a woman than he was no longer fit to be king. She had to be good looking to draw David in and a virgin so that they could see if he had had sex with her since one of his wives could have lied about his ability to have sex if she wanted to keep him on the throne. But David did not have sex with her.

1:5-6 The minute it was known that David had not had sex with Abishag, David's oldest son Adonijah announced that he was going to be king. David's three oldest sons Amnon (2 Sam. 13:28-29), Kileab (unknown), and Absalom (2 Sam. 18:14-17) were dead, making Adonijah next in line for the throne. Adonijah, as the oldest son, choose to follow the tradition of the ancient Near East rather than waiting to be appointed as king by David. Adonijah obtained a chariot and fifty men to serve as his royal guard just like Absalom before him (2 Sam. 15:1). Adonijah's acquiring of a chariot was a violation of the Deuteronomic regulations for the king (Deut. 17:16). The narrator states that Adonijah was handsome and had never been rebuked by his father. With the wealth and power of being king this was a dangerous combination.

1:7-10 Joab and Abiathar collaborated with Adonijah to make him king. Joab was appointed by David as his military commander after the capture of Jerusalem (1 Chr. 11:6). He was loyal to

³ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 68.

David (2 Sam. 3:27; 11:14-16; 14:1-22; 2 Sam. 20:9-10) although David publicly disavowed and cursed him (2 Sam. 3:29, 39). Abiathar was a descendant of Eli (1 Sam. 14:3; 22:20), whose house was under the judgment of Yahweh (1 Sam. 2:27-36). Eli's line was the descendant of Aaron's son Ithamar (Ex. 6:23). Abiathar escaped the massacre of his family by Saul and fled to David and became his priest throughout David's reign (1 Sam. 22:20-22; 2 Sam. 8:17). Joab and Abiathar probably supported Adonijah as a result of tradition as well, especially since it was not clear whom David had appointed as king.

But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and David's elite warriors did not support Adonijah. Zadok was made a priest when David became king over Jerusalem (2 Sam. 8:12). Zadok was a descendant of Aaron's son Eleazar (Ex. 6:23), a different line than Eli and therefore not under the judgment of Yahweh. Benaiah son of Jehoiada was made a commander in David's army when David became king of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 20:23; 23:20-23). Nathan the prophet communicated the Davidic Covenant to David (2 Sam. 7) and confronted David over his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12). Rei is unknown and Shimei was an antagonist against David (2 Sam. 16:5-14).

There was a divide between two factions. Those who were with David while on the run from Saul or while David was king in Hebron joined with Adonijah. Those who joined David in Jerusalem after he became king were opposed to Adonijah. It was the difference between the old ways and the new ways.⁴

Adonijah had a large feast celebrating his kingship where he invited all his supporters and brothers, except for Solomon. Why was Solomon, of all the king's sons, not invited to Adonijah's feast? Was it because he was the son of a scandalous union with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:24-25) and not seen to be a serious threat? Or was it because David had appointed Solomon as king (1 Kgs. 1:13) but had not officially announced it (1 Kgs. 1:20, 27)? The narrator does not say. The precise nature of the oath of David to Bathsheba, which Nathan describes (1 Kgs. 1:13), is unclear.

1:11-14 Upon hearing about Adonijah's self-appointment, Nathan did not go immediately to David but to Bathsheba instead. In a desire to save Solomon's life and make him king, Nathan instructed Bathsheba on how they were to approach David concerning the matter of kingship. Nathan unnecessarily names Adonijah's mother, possibly to initiate or fuel a rivalry between the two mothers. He instructed Bathsheba to go to David first, probably because David would be more moved by Bathsheba as his favorite wife. Nathan told her to remind David of the oath that David had given that Solomon would become king (1 Kgs. 1:13). The oath that Nathan claims David swore is mentioned nowhere in 2 Samuel but may be connected to the recognition of the uniqueness of Solomon (2 Sam. 12:24-25). The fact that this oath was never publicly announced (1 Kgs. 1:20, 27) raises uncomfortable questions about Nathan and Bathsheba's honesty about the whole process by which Solomon should become king.⁵ In light of this oath Bathsheba was to ask why Adonijah was then allowed to make himself king. Then Nathan would come in as the authority of Yahweh to reinforce Bathsheba's request.

1:15-21 So Bathsheba went to David who was being attended to by Abishag. Bathsheba reported the news of Adonijah's claim to the throne and who his supporters were. She reminded David of

⁴ See Ian W. Provan. *1 and 2 Kings*, pp. 24-25.

⁵ See Ian W. Provan. *1 and 2 Kings*, pp. 24-25.

his oath to make Solomon king, which David nowhere denies the truthfulness of the oath. She stated that all of Israel was waiting to see whom he would name as king. She then added that Solomon was the only one who was not involved in the conspiracy so was worthy of consideration for kingship. And if this conspiracy was not dealt with, Solomon's life and hers would be in danger.

1:22-27 Nathan then entered the room and specifically asked David if he had announced Adonijah as king. He repeated the information of how Adonijah had become king and who was with him in the conspiracy. He then made it clear that he as the prophet and Zadok the priest were specifically not invited, casting theological and political suspicion on the actions of Adonijah. He then asked again if David had authorized such actions. Where Bathsheba did more emotional pleading, Nathan was more forceful and emphasized the political nature of the circumstances. David's inability to appoint an heir had led to the current situation of confusion and rebellion in the kingdom. Once again David's inability to deal justly with his family members (1 Kgs. 1:6) had led to another son trying to take what did not belong to him.

1:28-40 Finally David remembered his oath and decided to publicly make it a reality. David then commanded Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the commander to put Solomon on David's mule and lead him to the Gihon. The mule in the ancient near east was a cross between a horse and a donkey. The reliability of the mule in the hill country made it a more desirable and practical animal. The cost of the mule meant that only the wealthy and kings could afford it and it became a symbol of wealth and royalty. By placing Solomon on David's personal mule, he was publicly and directly connecting Solomon's kingship to his own kingship. At the Gihon spring, which was a symbol of Yahweh's provision of life, Nathan and Zadok were to anoint Solomon as king. After which they were to parade him through the streets declaring him king and seat him on David's throne. Benaiah confirmed David's command and swore his loyalty to Solomon as his next king.

So, they filled a horn, a symbol of authority and power, with olive oil from the tabernacle and anointed Solomon as king at the Gihon spring. All the people of Israel followed behind Solomon and declared him king.

1:41-48 Meanwhile Adonijah was having a private and secretive meal with a small group of his co-conspirators. There is a stark contrast between the "great noise of the festivities" and the private dinner party of the elite. The narrator is stating that a public anointing with oil, mules, music, and popular involvement is how one becomes king, not through secret plotting. Jonathan, Abiathar's son, came into the house of Adonijah and reported that Solomon had been made king by "our lord King David." By calling David "our lord" he was emphasizing by what authority Solomon had been made king. He also emphasized that Solomon had the popular backing of the people of the city. There was no room for Adonijah as king.

1:49-53 Adonijah's guests understood what this meant and immediately fled, abandoning their support of Adonijah. Adonijah fled to the tabernacle courtyard and threw himself on the altar and grabbed hold of the horns. In the ancient Near East and in Israel the people customarily regarded the central sanctuary as a place of refuge (Ex. 21:12-14) even though there was no basis for it in the Law. When Solomon was told that Adonijah was on the altar, Solomon granted him life on the condition that from this point on he would never do anything to betray the throne or conspire to take it. Solomon was now clearly king.

2:1-4 Before David died, he gave Solomon final instructions on ruling Israel. The first thing that David instructed Solomon on was to be a man, which he defines as pursuing and obeying Yahweh. This is in contrast to his court and Adonijah who had defined manhood as the ability for conquest and sexual prowess (1 Kgs. 1:1-6). As a result of keeping the commands of Yahweh, Yahweh would prosper Solomon in all that he would do and, as Yahweh promised David (2 Sam. 7:12-16), Solomon would remain on the throne of Israel for the entirety of his life.

2:5-6 Second, David told Solomon to deal with Joab however he saw fit for his murder of Abner (2 Sam. 3:22-36) and Amasa (2 Sam. 20:8-13). Yet David strongly encouraged Solomon to execute Joab. David made it clear during his reign that he knew that Joab should be punished for his murders, yet he did nothing about it because it was politically convenient to keep Joab around to do David's dirty work. Now that Joab was no longer necessary for the reign of Solomon, David was ready to execute delayed justice in order to clear his conscience.

2:7 Third, David commanded Solomon to take care of Barzillai's sons. Barzillai had taken care of David while David was on the run from Absalom (2 Sam. 17:27-29) and David had taken an oath to bless Barzillai's family for his generosity (2 Sam. 19:31-39).

2:8-9 Fourth, David told Solomon to deal with Shimei however he saw fit for cursing David while David was on the run from Absalom (2 Sam. 16:5-14). However, David strongly encouraged Solomon to execute Shimei. Yet David had sworn an oath to Shimei that he would not kill him (2 Sam. 19:16-23). Shimei was of the tribe of Benjamin in favor of the old regime of Saul. David probably recommended that Solomon kill Shimei because he was so outspoken against David's family and did not want Solomon to have to deal with him during his reign. Yet David was willing to break his oath for political gain.

There could be little political gain in killing Shimei. Personal vengeance seems a more likely motivation. Yet, by couching Shimei's words as a "terrible curse," David supplies a dynastic reason to remove him. Shimei's death would break the power of the curse upon the house of David.⁶ By having Solomon kill Shimei, David could not be blamed for his death, and he would not have to worry about his own bloodguilt.

In the end with Joab and Shimei, David had suggested to Solomon that obedience to Moses' law must be accompanied by ruthless politics, if fragile peace was to become a lasting harmony. This advice contradicted his earlier advice to obey Yahweh and trust in Him. With his advice, David was passing the same political and violent machine state that he had created to his son.

2:10-12 David then died and was buried in the city of Jerusalem. Solomon was now the king of Israel. The question is: What kind of king would Solomon be and how would he implement the advice of David?

2:13-18 Adonijah came to Bathsheba requesting to marry Abishag the Shunammite (1 Kgs. 1:1-4). Taking the wives of the previous king was the same as taking that king's authority as one's own (2 Sam. 3:6-7; 12:8; 16:21). Thus, Adonijah was attempting to seize power from Solomon. Since David had not slept with Abishag, that put her in the grey area of being David's wife. Adonijah pursuing Abishag would have given him a small first step through the doorway of seizing kingship without being overt and drawing attention to his actions.

⁶ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 75.

Adonijah may have gone to Bathsheba instead of Solomon hoping that Bathsheba would be politically ignorant or easily persuaded. However, Bathsheba suspiciously asked him if his intentions were peaceful, to which he said yes. He began by making himself out to be the injured party by noting that the kingdom was his when he claimed that “all of Israel” expected him to be king. His remark, “you know” shows that he believed that Bathsheba undermined his succession. Yet, he acknowledged that Yahweh had given Solomon the kingdom and assured Bathsheba that he had accepted Solomon as Yahweh’s choice. Then he went on and asked for Abishag as his wife showing that he had not accepted Yahweh’s choice. This put him in opposition to Yahweh, which shows him to be unworthy of kingship. The book of Samuel showed that true leadership is submitting to the will of Yahweh as the sovereign king.

2:19-25 When Bathsheba took Adonijah’s request to Solomon, she omitted all of Adonijah’s attempted justifications from his request, stripping it of any neutrality. This shows that she knew exactly what Adonijah was seeking and she presented it to Solomon in such a way that he would remove Adonijah as a threat. Solomon, enraged by Adonijah’s request, came to the conclusion that his earlier leniency with Adonijah was a mistake and commanded Benaiah to kill Adonijah.

2:26-27 After this, Solomon went to Abiathar the priest, and despite Abiathar’s rebellion against his throne he allowed Abiathar to live because of his faithfulness to David and being a priest of Yahweh. However, he removed Abiathar from the priesthood fulfilling Yahweh’s judgment against Eli’s house (1 Sam. 2:27-36).

2:36-35 Joab, realizing that he was next, fled to the altar in the tabernacle courtyard and seized the horns just as Adonijah had (1 Kgs. 1:49-53). Solomon commanded Benaiah to kill Joab despite being in the tabernacle courtyard. Solomon had Joab killed because he was a threat to Solomon and the unity of kingdom of Israel, not because he was guilty of murder. Solomon then appointed Benaiah as the new commander of the army and Zadok as the new high priest.

2:36-46 Solomon appeared reluctant to simply execute Shimei. Perhaps he did not want to alienate the Benjaminite supporters by unjustly killing one of their own.⁷ So he let Shimei live but confined him to Jerusalem and told him he was never to cross the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem or he would die. Shimei agreed to the terms.

Two years later two of Shimei’s slaves ran away and he went to Philistine territory to get them back. Shimei’s actions were neutral but Solomon accused him of breaking his oath. But technically Shimei did not break his oath for he never crossed the Kidron Valley in the east but went west to Philistia. Solomon then had Shimei executed. Solomon took oaths seriously only when it suited him and reinterpreted them when he felt like it.

The narrator states that “the kingdom was now established in Solomon’s hands.” Yet never once did Solomon seek out Yahweh’s will. He established his kingdom through the political and bloody advice of his father rather than obedience to Yahweh’s commands. His actions were merely that of power and politics thinly disguised as a morality tale. If Yahweh had truly ordained Solomon as king, then it was not because David’s house was innocent (as Solomon implies in 1 Kgs. 2:31-33) but because Yahweh’s grace was sufficient to deal with their guilt (as the author is communicating). This will remain true throughout the book of Kings. For without grace, law can only lead mortal beings to death.⁸

⁷ See Baruch Halpern. *David’s Secret Demons: Messiah, Murder, Traitor, King*, p. 400.

⁸ See Ian W. Provan. *1 and 2 Kings*, pp. 40-41.



B. Solomon Establishes His Kingdom with Wisdom (3:1-4:34)

Solomon was clearly king, and the kingdom was secure for now. This section's primary narrative goal is to demonstrate Yahweh's blessing upon Israel through Solomon. Solomon pleased Yahweh by asking for wisdom. As Solomon operated out of Yahweh's wisdom, Yahweh used him to fulfill His promises made a long time ago to Abraham and David, to a fuller extent than Israel had ever experienced them. However, there were also negative aspects to the reign of Solomon that are mentioned here but will be more fully developed in 1 Kgs. 5, 10 and 11.

3:1 The narrator informs the reader that Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh of Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. The Pharaoh here may be Siamun of the twenty-first dynasty (978-960 BC).⁹ This alliance was a violation of Deuteronomic regulations for the king (Deut. 17:14-20), which specifically forbid the king from going back to Egypt for anything and forbid collecting wives. Alliances through marriage (Gen. 34:9; Deut. 7:3; Josh. 23:12; 1 Sam. 18:21-27; 1 Kgs. 3:1; 2 Chr. 18:1; Ezra 9:14) are negatively evaluated, for they are alliances by marriage to foreign idolatrous women, which is a breach of covenant (Deut. 7:3). These foreign women could lead the king astray with their idolatry, which was exactly what would happen to Solomon. This alliance also shows that Solomon was trusting Pharaoh for the protection of his borders more than Yahweh. This is an incredibly negative mark on the character of Solomon.

Solomon lived in the palace of David in the old City of David (Jerusalem) until he finished building a new section of city to the north of Jerusalem, which included a newly built palace and the temple. The mention of the Pharaoh's daughter being kept in the old City of David until the palace was finished causes the reader to wonder, was there an influence of his foreign wife on the building of the palace? If so, this was already a negative influence she had on him.

3:2 The narrator states that the people of Israel were worshiping at the high places because the temple had not been built yet. High places were hills where the Canaanites had built altars to their gods. Yahweh had commanded Israel to destroy all the high places (Num. 33:52; Lev. 26:30). Yahweh condemned worship of any kind at these high places and He commanded Israel to worship only in the tabernacle (Deut. 12:1-7). Why did the Israelites have to sacrifice at the high places when there was a tabernacle (Deut. 12:1-7)? Evidently the people justified their disobedience on the ground that they did not have a permanent temple where Yahweh could dwell. Yet all throughout the book of Kings Yahweh condemns the kings who did not tear down the high places (1 Kgs. 12:31-32; 13:2, 32-33; 14:23; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kgs. 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35; 16:4; 17:9, 29, 32; 21:3). Hezekiah and Josiah were commended for tearing down the high places (2 Kgs. 18:4; 23:5, 8, 13, 19-20). The verse (1 Kgs. 3:3) condemns the practice of sacrificing and burning incense at the high places.

3:3 Despite these negative marks the narrator states that Solomon loved Yahweh and obeyed His commands. The love here is a covenant loyalty love (Deut. 5:10; 7:9; Josh. 22:5; 23:11). However, Solomon offered sacrifices to Yahweh at the high places. Even though the sacrifice was offered to Yahweh the narrator makes it clear that it was wrong. Solomon's love for Yahweh was not entirely whole hearted.

3:4-9 Solomon offered sacrifices at Gibeon, which was about four miles northwest of Jerusalem. Chronicles states that the tabernacle and the altar were located in Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39-40; 21:28-29; 2 Chron. 1:3, 5-6). Yet David had taken the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem when he

⁹ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 85.

became king of Israel (2 Sam. 6). 1 Kgs. 3:15 states that it was still in Jerusalem, which was implicitly understood in 1 Kgs. 1:39, 49; 2:28-34. It seems that the Ark of the Covenant was no longer in the tabernacle. Solomon showed his love to Yahweh by making a thousand sacrifices at Gibeon, because one animal would not have truly been a costly sacrifice for Solomon as king. Sacrifice without sacrifice is not a true sacrifice.

Yahweh must have been truly pleased with Solomon, for at Gibeon He offered Solomon anything that he wanted. This was most likely a test of Solomon's loyalty for there were so many ungodly things that Solomon could have asked for that Yahweh would have never granted Him.

Solomon acknowledged that he was where he was only because of Yahweh's faithfulness to His covenant to David (2 Sam. 7:8-16). Then Solomon acknowledged that he was inexperienced and that his kingship so far had not been without flaws (establishing it on bloody politics rather than the guidance of Yahweh). Yet now he confessed ignorance and sought Yahweh's wisdom and discernment. Solomon had just learned that fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom (Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Prov. 15:33). Solomon calling himself a "boy" cannot be taken at face value for he was married and had fathered children. And one of them was born a year before he became king, for he ruled forty years (1 Kgs. 11:42) and was succeeded by a forty-one-year old son (1 Kgs. 14:21). It is a reference to his youthful inexperience (Jer. 1:6) and to his lack of military leadership (Deut. 28:6; 31:2; Josh. 14:11; 1 Sam. 18:13; 29:6; 2 Sam. 5:2; 1 Kgs. 15:7).¹⁰

3:10-15 Yahweh's enthusiasm to grant Solomon's request is indicated in His double statement "I have acted according to your word" and "I have given to you a wise and discerning heart." Yahweh made him the wisest man that has ever lived and also granted him the wealth and power that he could have asked for, but didn't. Yahweh then reiterated the promises of long life and security in His covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:8-16), if Solomon obeyed the commands of Yahweh. The question is: Would the reign of Solomon change with his new gift of wisdom or would he continue to be influenced by cultural politics and his Egyptian wife?

3:16-22 The narrator now shows how Yahweh's wisdom makes all the difference in ruling in a godly way. This is illustrated in the story of the two prostitutes who came to Solomon to settle a dispute between the two of them. The fact that they were prostitutes immediately calls their trustworthiness into account. The first prostitute explains what happened. They both had given birth to baby boys and the second prostitute had rolled over on her child in the night and accidentally killed him. She then took the child of the first prostitute, who was speaking, as her own while she was sleeping. When the first prostitute awoke, she discovered that her child had been taken and she had been given the dead child. The second prostitute then exclaimed that the story was a lie. There was no way to know who was telling the truth for as prostitutes they had no family or community to verify the identity of the babies, and their word meant nothing.

3:23-28 In a great act of wisdom that would amaze everyone, Solomon asked for a sword to cut the living child in half and give each mother a portion of the child they were fighting over. In horror the real mother said that the other woman could have the child so that she may know that her child would live. The false mother was all right with the child dying out of spite and grief for the loss of her child. It was then that Solomon knew who the real mother was and told his men to give the living child to the mother who was willing to give him up so that he might live.

¹⁰ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 86.

Many translations are misleading when they say, “Give the living baby to the first woman” (1 Kgs. 3:27). In the Hebrew the narrator never mentions whether the first or second prostitute was willing to give up her child so that he may live. The narrator keeps the reader in the dark and the mystery puts focus on the wisdom of Solomon rather than on the true mother. In using the wisdom of Yahweh, Solomon had put the sword in the hands of Yahweh to grant life (Ps. 17:13; 45:2-4) rather than in his own hands to destroy life (1 Kgs. 2). The people of Israel clearly saw that this wisdom came from Yahweh.

4:1-6 After telling of the wisdom of Solomon over the daily lives of the people, the narrator then details the wisdom of Solomon as an administrator over the kingdom of Israel. First Solomon’s officials and their responsibilities are listed. The surprising part of this list is that Azariah the son of Zadok was high priest. It seems that Zadok had stepped down. And then the narrator states that both Zadok and Abiathar were priests. Solomon had previously disposed of Abiathar (1 Kgs. 2:27), yet he had now been reinstated with Solomon’s change of heart (1 Kgs. 3). The fact that Zadok and Abiathar stood as equals in the priesthood shows that this was new order of administration devised out of Yahweh’s given wisdom. Benaiah had been previously mentioned and the others are unknown. Azariah and Zabud are listed as sons of Nathan, mostly likely referring to Nathan the prophet.

There is the unsettling note of Adoniram son of Abda, who was first mentioned as one of David’s appointees (2 Sam. 20:24), and who was now in charge of the forced labor. The term “forced labor” was negatively used of the Israelite slavery in Egypt (Ex. 1). Solomon was looking more like the new Pharaoh.

4:7-20 Solomon then divided the nation into twelve districts with two officials over each district. The reason for creating these districts rather than sticking with the tribal system is unclear and the focus is on the officials and not the boundaries of the districts. Yet it is clear as one continues to read that the tribal system was still predominate in all other areas of thinking in Israel. The purpose of the districts was to provide for the income and food of Solomon’s palace. Each district was responsible for one month out of the year. It could be that the districts were more balanced in their economic status than the tribes were, which were based on geography, as to not overly burden one district over another as they were taxed by the royal court. Solomon had devised an economic system that ensured that the royal household had enough to eat but did not oppress the people. Some have argued that these districts did not include Judah. Yet this is not likely since Socoh was a Judean town (Josh. 15:35; 1 Sam. 17:1) and Arubboth may have been a Judean town (Josh. 15:52). The district governors represented Solomon in all of Judea and Israel.

4:21-25 The unity and happiness of Israel is emphasized in statement that Yahweh was fulfilling His promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:4-5; 22:17; 26:4) and that both Israel and Judah had plenty to eat and were happy. Solomon was using the wisdom of Yahweh to bless his people with the Abrahamic covenant blessings and bringing unity and contentment to the tribes.

Solomon’s kingdom was about the same size of David’s kingdom (2 Sam. 8:1-14; 10; 11:1) as he ruled from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates River. This was the land that Yahweh had promised that He would give Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 15:18-21; 17:6-8). The nations of Solomon’s kingdom brought tribute to him as Yahweh’s earthly vice regent. Usually when a king died the nations that were subjects under his rule would withhold taxes and rebel against his successor. This would force the new king to attack those nations in order to establish his rule

over them. However, Solomon did not have to do this, for Yahweh had given him a peaceful reign.¹¹

Every day one of the districts provided Solomon's palace with 1675 gallons of flour (about 13,400 loafs of bread), 3,351 gallons of meal, 30 cows (about 13,500 pounds of meat since a cow produces between 450 and 500 pounds of meat), 100 lambs (about 4,500 pounds of meat since a lamb produces between 45 and 50 pounds of meat), rams, gazelles, deer, and well-fed birds. The reason for all this food was because Solomon's court was large since his kingdom was so large.

The narrator states that the borders of Israel were safe, secure, and there was peace in the land. The reference to everyone living under their own vine and fig shows that they lived under the blessings of Yahweh (Joel 2:22; Micah 4:4 in contrast with Ps. 105:33; Jer. 5:17). This shows that despite the provisions the people had to provide for the palace, there were no economic difficulties for the people. With the wisdom of Yahweh Solomon had brought rest and happiness to the people.

4:26-28 However, Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses. This was a violation of the Deuteronomic regulations for the king that forbids the king from acquiring horses (Deut. 17:16). Not only did he have the officials take care of the kingdom, but they were required to take care of his horses. Solomon was great and wise, but each chapter thus far has raised questions about the glory and wisdom of Solomon's reign. He was using the wisdom of Yahweh for his own wealth and glory as well.

“Another significant linguistic connection is found in the usage of the word ‘hear’ (*sm* ‘; 4:34), where twice it is told that Solomon's wisdom is heard by all peoples and kings of the earth. The international ‘hearing’ mirrors the prior ‘hearing’ of the people Israel (3:28). Even more, it mirrors the earlier ‘hearing’ of Solomon's own heart (3:9, 11). Because Solomon hears, God's wisdom is heard throughout Israel and beyond. Unfortunately, it will also be the state of Solomon's heart (11:4) that causes Israel's later misfortune.”¹²

4:29-34 The narrator then summarizes the wisdom of Solomon concerning his understanding of creation and life. Yahweh gave Solomon wisdom that was as measureless as the sand on the seashore, alluding to Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:4-5; 22:17; 26:4). Solomon was wiser than any of the wisest men and he became famous throughout the nations. He was also a teacher who taught on all kinds of subjects and spoke proverbs. Yahweh blessed Solomon and used his wisdom to bring people from all over the world to see His nation and the sovereign God that He is. Yahweh used Solomon to be a blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:3).

¹¹ See Richard D. Paterson and Hermann J. Austel. “1 & 2 Kings,” p. 52.

¹² Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 98.



C. Solomon Builds the Temple and His Palace (5:1-8:66)

This section deals with the building of the temple. The problem is that Yahweh never wanted a temple. First, in 2 Sam. 7:4-7 Yahweh made it very clear that He had never asked for a temple and did not want a temple. Nowhere does Yahweh ever command David or Solomon to build the temple. For the temple building cannot be initiated by humans any more than kingship could be initiated by humans (1 Sam. 8:4-9). The “house” that David’s son was to build (2 Sam. 7:13) was the people of Yahweh (“household”) as Yahweh had made clear in 2 Sam. 7:11-12. Stephen specifically made the point that Yahweh lived in the tabernacle, but Solomon was the one who built the temple (Acts 7:44-50). And Yahweh does not live in houses built by men. Stephen used the temple as an example of the stubbornness and hard heartedness of Israel (Acts 7:51). The author of Hebrews compares Jesus to the tabernacle, not the temple, even though the temple was what the Jews of his time knew, and they had never seen the tabernacle (Heb. 9).

Second, Yahweh was the one who gave instructions for the building of the tabernacle (Ex. 26-31), yet nowhere did Yahweh ever give instructions or blueprints for the building of the temple. This is also seen in the fact that more space is spent regarding the instructions and building of the tabernacle (Ex. 25-31; 35-40) than the temple (1 Kgs. 5-8).

Third, the temple looked more pagan than it did biblical. Solomon built it to look like a Phoenician temple with graven images of bulls (1 Kgs. 7:25-26), which was a violation of the second commandment (Ex. 20:4-6), and the cherubim were larger than the Ark of the Covenant (1 Kgs. 6:23-28).

Fourth, the temple stones were carved with human hands and tools (1 Kgs. 6:7), which was forbidden by Yahweh (Ex. 20:25; Deut. 27:5, 6. Josh. 8:30, 31). Yahweh specifically commanded that no monument or altar built to Him could be shaped with human hands or tools.

Fifth, Solomon used forced labor to build the temple (1 Kgs. 5:13-18). Yahweh had specified that only willing volunteers were to build the tabernacle (Ex. 35:21),

Sixth, was that one of the purposes of the tabernacle was its ability to travel around and be with all the people in the Promised Land. The stationary nature of the temple would lead the people to thinking that Yahweh was limited to one location and give them a false sense of security and a sign of Yahweh’s approval (Jer. 7:1-34).

Seventh, the tabernacle was never attacked or destroyed by pagan nations, which was a form of Yahweh’s judgment against Israel (Deut. 27). But Yahweh allowed the temple to be repeatedly attacked and destroyed over Israel’s history.

The following chapters make it clear that Solomon’s reasons for the temple were not about the glory of Yahweh but his own glory. The fact that Solomon’s palace was larger than the temple suggests misplaced priorities on Solomon’s part.

5:1-12 Hiram was the king of Tyre, which was located north of Israel in Phoenicia. He had an alliance with David and sent David cedar logs to build his palace (2 Sam. 5:11). Now that Solomon was king, Hiram king of Tyre sought to continue his alliance with Solomon.

Solomon responded to Hiram king of Tyre with the statement that his father David was not able to build Yahweh a temple because of all the battles he was fighting. Now that Solomon’s kingdom was at peace he wanted to build a temple. Solomon then asked that Hiram king of Tyre send him cedar and that their men would work together, and Solomon would pay their wages.

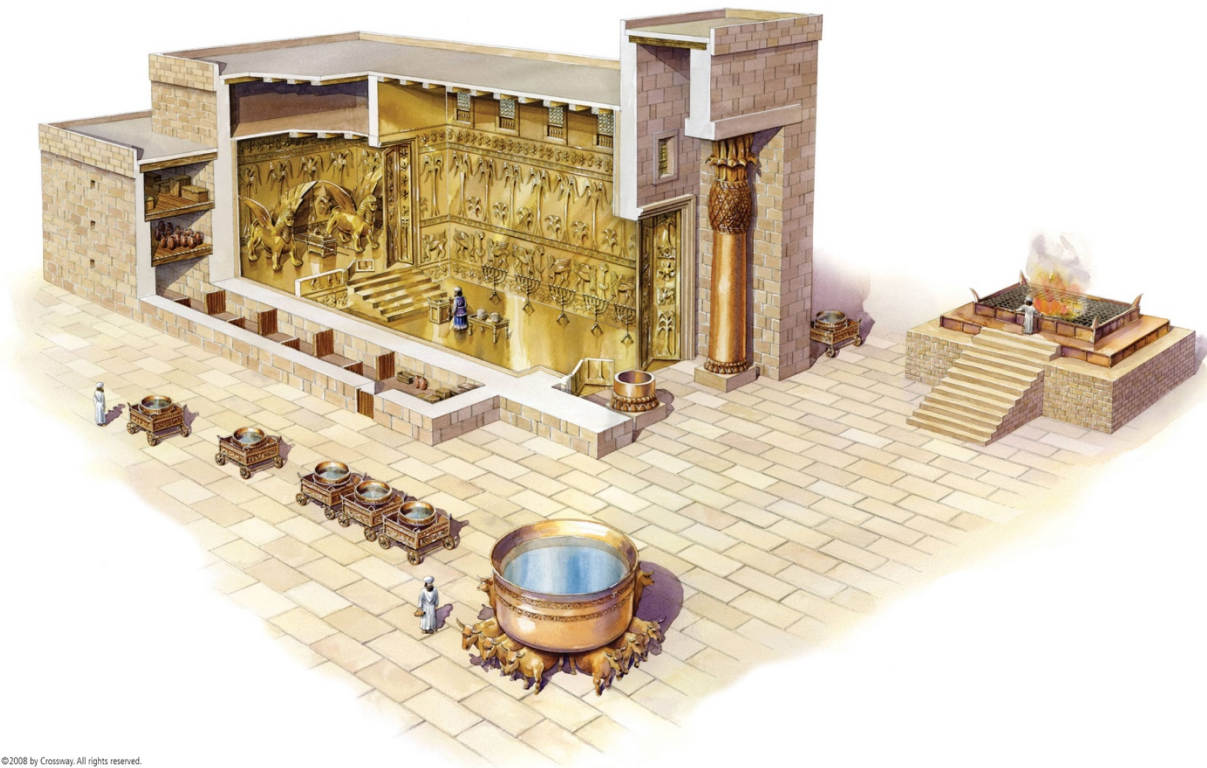
Hiram king of Tyre responded that he would send cedar logs to Solomon but his men in his nation would cut them down and send them down to Israel, then Solomon's men could take them from there. Hiram king of Tyre was trying to keep Solomon from entering his region and taking control of the project. Hiram king of Tyre's fee would be that Solomon would feed his royal palace.

Hiram king of Tyre supplied Solomon with cedar logs and Solomon provided Hiram king of Tyre 1,117,101 gallons of wheat and 120,000 gallons of oil. Yahweh blessed Solomon with wisdom and good relations between himself and Hiram king of Tyre.

On the surface it looks like Solomon and Hiram king of Tyre were equals but the dialogue shows that Solomon saw himself as the superior. It was Hiram king of Tyre that hears Solomon and responds. Three times Solomon used the word "need" when speaking to Hiram king of Tyre but did not ask what he needed. Hiram king of Tyre responded with "I will meet your needs."

5:13-18 Solomon conscripted forced labor from all Israel. Not only was this wrong because Yahweh commanded that only willing volunteers build the tabernacle (Ex. 35:21), but this was also enslavement that would eventually lead to Solomon's abuse of the people (1 Kgs. 12:1-3, 12-17).

Solomon then violated their terms of agreement by sending his men to Tyre to cut down the trees and sent them south to Israel. Solomon was only interested in getting what he wanted. He was happy to negotiate to a certain extent and ignore the terms that did not suit him.



6:1-10 Solomon began to build the temple in the fourth year of his reign, which was 967 BC. The temple was 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high. The porch in front of the main hall of the temple was 30 feet long. There were windows at the top part of the temple. Solomon had three levels of storerooms built on both sides of the temple.

Yahweh specifically commanded that no monument or altar built to him could be shaped with human hands or tools (Ex. 20:25; Deut. 27:5-6). Solomon reinterpreted Yahweh's regulation against shaping stones to be as long as it did not happen at the site where the stone would be set in place. This is a faulty interpretation to justify his designs.

6:11-13 The description of the temple is interrupted with a sobering word from Yahweh. Yahweh came to Solomon and placed the theology of the temple in its proper place. Yahweh would approve of this "dwelling" and live among His people only if they obeyed Him as He had commanded them to with the tabernacle (Lev. 26:11-12). Yahweh made no comment on the details, effort, or expense involved in the building of the temple. All the grandeur and splendor of the temple did not matter to Yahweh and did not change anything about His nature or His relationship with His people (1 Kgs. 8:27-30). This is something that the Israelites would forget when the temple became the center of their national life. It gave them a false security of Yahweh's acceptance of them regardless of their obedience to Yahweh (Jer. 7:1-34). What is unsettling is that Solomon gave no response to Yahweh's words.

6:14-35 The narrator then begins to describe the inside of the temple where most of the attention is given to the holy of holies. The holy of holies was 30 feet wide and 30 feet long. And the holy place was 30 feet wide and 60 feet long. All the stone on the inside of the temple was covered with cedar panels. Solomon then covered all the cedar inside the temple with gold.

In the holy of holies Solomon made two cherubim on either side of the Ark of the Covenant that were 15 feet high and the wing span of both of the cherubim together was 30 feet wide spanning the entire width of the holy of holies. The Ark of the Covenant, that represented the presence of Yahweh, was only 52 inches long, 31 inches wide, and 31 inches high. Not only was Solomon placing two graven images in the temple of Yahweh, which was a violation of the Law (Ex. 20:4-5) but they were far larger than the Ark of the Covenant that represented Yahweh. Why these cherubim had to be so large in a room that only the high priest went into one time a year on the Day of Atonement is baffling (Lev. 16:2, 29-34; 23:27-28; Heb. 9:7). Cherubim do stand before the throne of Yahweh as a barrier between Yahweh and humans because of sin (Gen. 3:24), Yet Yahweh never commanded the construction of these cherubim, let alone to make them so big and put them in the holy of holies. There were already two small cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant that was commanded by Yahweh (Ex. 25:17-22). Solomon then had images of cherubim carved into the walls of the inside of the temple and the doors, which was closer to the command of Yahweh concerning the tabernacle (Ex. 26:1, 31; Ezek. 1). Solomon spent seven years building the temple.

7:1-12 However, it took Solomon thirteen years to build his palace and it was 150 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Solomon's misplaced priorities becomes evident when one learns that he put more time and money into his "house" (*bayith*) and made it much larger than the "house" of Yahweh (*bayith*). Between 1 Kgs. 6:38 and 1 Kgs. 7:1 there is an emphatic contrast between the two houses (*bayith*) and an emphasis that his took longer to build. In addition, the narrator's discussion of the building of the palace (1 Kgs. 7:1-12) interrupts the discussion of the building of the temple (1 Kgs. 6:1-38 and 7:13-51) in order to make the point that Solomon saw

his palace as more of a priority. This section is bracketed by the verses that highlight the competing interests of the house for Pharaoh's daughter and the house of Yahweh. Once again Pharaoh's daughter is mentioned in connection to the palace (1 Kgs. 3:1). All of this puts Solomon in a negative light. Solomon put many halls in his palace and there was so much cedar in it that it was called the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon. The narrator even points out that the foundational stones of his house were larger than those of the temple.

7:13-14 The Hiram mentioned here was not Hiram the king of Tyre (1 Kgs. 5). This Hiram was from the tribe of Naphtali and was placed in charge of the building of the temple. In 2 Chr. 2:13; 4:11, 16 his name is spelled "Hiram." In a way he is described like Bezalel, whom Yahweh filled with His Spirit, wisdom, and skills to build the tabernacle and its engravings (Ex. 31:1-11; 35:30-35). However, he is a half Israelite, his work is limited to bronze work, he was not filled with the Spirit of Yahweh, and his wisdom is not said to have come from Yahweh.

7:15-22 Solomon put two bronze pillars on each side of the front door of the temple. Each pillar was 27 feet high and 18 feet in circumference. He made 7-foot-tall bronze tops for each pillar in the shape of lilies. He encircled the tops of the pillars with pomegranate-shaped ornaments. Pomegranates were a symbol of fertility and Yahweh's blessing. Yahweh had Moses decorate the hem of the high priest's robe with pomegranate-shaped balls of yarn (Ex. 28:31-35). Solomon named the left pillar Boaz, which means "strength" and the right pillar Yakin, which means "he establishes."

7:23-26 In the courtyard of the temple he made a large bronze basin called "The Sea." Its diameter was 15 feet, it was 7 ½ feet tall, its circumference was 45 feet, and it held about 12,000 gallons of water. This replaced the bronze washbasin in the courtyard of tabernacle used for the cleansing of sins (Ex. 30:17-21).

The Sea sat on twelve bronze bulls, three facing each direction of the compass. The twelve may represent the twelve tribes. Bulls were a symbol of strength and power in the ancient Near East. This too would have been a violation of the Law forbidding graven images (Ex. 20:4-5).

7:27-39 Solomon made ten bronze movable stands that were 6 feet wide, 6 feet long, and 4 feet high. They were on wheels so the people could use them. They had lions, cherubim, and palm trees carved into the sides. Then he put a bronze washbasin on each stand. The washbasins were 6 feet in diameter and held 240 gallons of water.

7:40-51 Hiram made all these items, including all the tools for the temple. Solomon also made the furniture of the temple. The golden altar of incense, the golden table of showbread, five candle stands on each side of the holy place. When the temple was finished, he brought in all the silver, gold, and furnishings that David had dedicated and placed them in the treasuries of the Yahweh's temple.

8:1-11 There is no indication of how many years have passed between 1 Kgs. 6:38 and 1 Kgs. 8:1. The dedication of the temple happened in the month of Ethanim also called Tishri. This is the month of the festivals of Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles (Lev. 23:23-43). Whether the dedication pre-empted the completion (perhaps the bronze and gold work) by one month or was delayed eleven months is uncertain. Solomon had all the officials and heads of the tribes come to the temple for its dedication. The Levites then brought the Ark of the Covenant from the old City of David in Jerusalem to the temple north of Jerusalem and they made an uncountable number of animal sacrifices (Num. 4).

It is interesting that the narrator points out that the Ark of the Covenant, that represented Yahweh, was placed under the cherubim and that the wings of the cherubim *overshadowed* the Ark. One of the reasons that Yahweh wanted a tabernacle and not a temple was so that His tabernacle and Ark could move around the land of Israel and dwell with all the people. This way He would not be seen as a static deity tied to a specific geographical location and building, but rather a dynamic deity free to move throughout creation. Now, with Solomon taking upon himself to build a temple, Yahweh would be seen as a static deity. The reality of Yahweh would be overshadowed by the human desire to build something glorious that really honored themselves. Nobody looks at an amazing cathedral and thinks how awesome Yahweh is, they think how talented and amazing the architects' engineering and artistic skills are. The Israelites would begin to think that their blessings came from Yahweh's presence in the unmovable temple rather than from their obedience to His Laws (Jer. 7:1-34). This would lead to their false sense of security that the exile would not come like the prophets said it would. They trusted more in the presence of the temple than they did in the word of Yahweh spoken through His prophets. Later the Pharisees and Sadducees would turn the temple into a machine state for their own power and attack Jesus when he said that it would be destroyed.

The narrator states that the stone tablets of Deut. 10:1-5 were in the Ark of the Covenant and that the poles for carrying were along its sides (Ex. 25:10-16) even though they would never be used again since it would never be moved again like Yahweh originally wanted. The Ark of the Covenant would never be mentioned again except when Josiah returned it to the temple after celebrating the Passover meal (1 Chr. 35:1-4).

Yahweh specifically told David that He did not want a temple (2 Sam. 7:4-16) and the temple was not built according to His initiative and or plans, yet His glory entered the temple as a sign of His approval just as it had done with the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-38). But this was not the first time that Yahweh had given the people something that He had not approved of. When Israel asked for a king "like all the other nations" (1 Sam. 8:1-20) Yahweh gave them a king "like all the nations" even though He did not want them to have that type of king. But He gave them this type of king as judgment for their desire for autonomy. In the face of unrelenting human disobedience, Yahweh permits what He explicitly condemns, leaving humans to the consequences of their actions. Yahweh's decision to give them a king and His command to Samuel to give it to them is crucial because it shows that Yahweh took the initiative in appointing the king.¹³ Now He was allowing them to have a temple for the same reasons. What is interesting is that nowhere was the tabernacle desecrated or destroyed in all of its years of use. Yet from this point on the temple would be desecrated multiple times and destroyed twice (586 BC and 70 AD). And, as already mentioned, its existence led the Israelites to a false theology of who Yahweh was (Jer. 7:1-34). Later the prophets and Jesus would reject the temple and tell of the day that Yahweh would replace it with the body of Christ (John 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:1-10).

8:12-21 Upon seeing the glory of Yahweh entering the temple, Solomon said that they had built a magnificent temple for Yahweh to dwell in forever. Though Solomon knew it was not true he talked as if Yahweh was really going to live there forever (1 Kgs. 8:27). Solomon then turned to the people to bless them. But what he said was not so much a blessing for the people as an ambiguous justification for the building of the temple.

¹³ See Jan P. Fokkelman. *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, p. 354.

Solomon acknowledged that Yahweh had fulfilled His promise to David to make him a leader over Israel and make his descendants kings (2 Sam. 7:4-16). Solomon noted that Yahweh had not chosen a city in which to build a temple, but rather he had chosen David to be a leader over His people. Then Solomon incorrectly stated that Yahweh said that David would not build the temple, but his son would, which contradicts what his previous statement. He said that he built the temple to honor Yahweh, yet he had never consulted Yahweh on the building of the temple.

8:22-61 Solomon then turned toward the sky and first praised Yahweh for His incomparability and His covenant faithfulness (1 Kgs. 8:23-26). Second, he acknowledged that the temple was not really Yahweh's home and couldn't contain Him, but asked Yahweh to show approval of and bless the temple and nation (1 Kgs. 8:27-30). Third, he prayed that Yahweh would act as judge over the Israel (1 Kgs. 8:31-32). Fourth, Solomon anticipated that Israel would disobey Yahweh and that He would bring the curses of Deut. 27-28 and they would go into exile. So, he prayed that Yahweh would honor His promise and restore Israel back to the land (1 Kgs. 8:33-40, 44-53). Fifth, Solomon prayed that the foreigner would be accepted in the land and his prayers would be heard by Yahweh in the temple (1 Kgs. 8:41-43). Solomon then blessed the people by asking that Yahweh would never forsake them and that he would enable the people to obey Him, so that all the nations would be able to know Yahweh.

8:62-66 Then the Solomon dedicated and purified the temple and courtyard with lots of animal sacrifices and celebrated the Day of Atonement for seven days. Yet, the fact that Solomon used forced labor to build the temple casts a shadow upon the temple. Once the temple was finished Solomon's rule worsened, threatening the continued restoration of the Sabbath rest the temple symbolizes (1 Kgs. 9:6-9). With Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, his accumulation of horses from Egypt, his building projects, and his oppressive forced labor he looked more like the Egyptian Pharaohs than like the image of God as Yahweh's vice regent.

D. The Fruits of Solomon's Reign (9:1-11:43)

Much of 1 Kgs. 9 reveals that, alongside the building of Yahweh's temple, lived a king who repeatedly walked outside the covenant life of Yahweh's chosen people. Starting in 1 Kgs. 9, but especially in 1 Kgs. 10, gold is mentioned a lot (1 Kgs. 9:14, 28; 10:2, 10-11, 14, 16-18, 21-22, 25), which is shown to be Solomon's true pursuit, not obedience to Yahweh. Even though it seems that the emphasis is on the Queen of Sheba being impressed with Solomon's wisdom, the real emphasis is on the gold and the luxury of the royal palace. Solomon's wealth is self-indulgent. Gold was not mentioned in 1 Kgs. 4-5 where prosperity abounded. The prosperity was described in terms of food, not gold.¹⁴ The emphasis here on the gold shows that Yahweh was no longer the focus of Solomon's life. This section then ends with Solomon's pursuit of pagan wives and gods. Yet even with a failed king Yahweh's purposes are not thwarted and He shows Himself to be Israel's true king (Ex. 15:18; Deut. 33:5), for Solomon's failure points to Yahweh as king.

“No monarch in Israelite history surpasses Solomon in the material realm, but it cannot be coincidental that after a detailed inventory of Solomon's horde of gold and stables full of horses, there is a decisive shift in tone in 1 Kgs 11:1-13. In terms of the narrative design, there has been a subtle critique in the first ten chapters that generally hovers below the surface, and even while reporting Solomon's wealth achievements, there are warnings both implicit and explicit. Daniel Hays contends that the allusions to Deuteronomy 17 in chapter 10 bring the critical appraisal to a crescendo, and thus ‘there is a strong evidence to support the view that the narrator is not schizophrenic, praising Solomon for ten chapters and then suddenly condemning him. Rather the narrator develops a fascinating but negative critique of Solomon throughout the Solomonic narratives. His critique is subtle, employing irony, word associations and implicit rather than explicit references to Deuteronomy, 1-2 Samuel and the rest of 1- 2 Kings.’ After a lengthy delay that must be owing to God's forbearance, judgment now unfolds, and Solomon's infidelities have implications for the entire nation. For those readers who have been mesmerized by the urbane sophistication and seduced by the international delights of the new regime, Solomon may not be the only one unmasked in the next section of the narrative.”¹⁵

9:1-9 Yahweh then appeared to Solomon a second time in Gibeon and He promised that He would do what Solomon had petitioned in his dedicatory prayer and would honor His covenant promises. But Solomon and the people had to remember that it was not the temple that brought His blessing but their obedience to Yahweh's commands. If Israel did not obey Yahweh then He would remove them from their land, abandon the temple, and make Israel a curse instead of a blessing. Yahweh kept making this point because their priorities were not right.

9:10-14 Solomon then cheated Hiram king of Tyre by giving him twenty towns in Galilee of little worth. Hiram king of Tyre was upset with Solomon and called the towns *cabul*, which means “good for nothing.” Solomon also gave away cities that he had no right to give away because they were given to Israel by Yahweh. On top of that, Hiram king of Tyre gave Solomon 9,000 pounds of gold. There was no mention of gold in the original agreement made between the two kings yet now Solomon expected it (1 Kgs. 5:1-18). Likewise, this is a violation of the

¹⁴ See Ian W. Provan. *1 and 2 Kings*, p. 85.

¹⁵ Keith Bodner. *The Theology of the Book of Kings*, pp. 81-82, citing J. Daniel Hays. “Has the Narrator Come to praise Solomon or Bury Him?” pp. 173-174.

Deuteronomic regulations for the king that forbids the king from collecting silver and gold (Deut. 17:17).

9:14-24 The narrator then states that in addition to the forced labor of the Israelites (1 Kgs. 5:13-18) Solomon also used the forced labor of non-Israelites to build the temple, his palace, and many cities. Once again not only were the builders of the tabernacle and thus the temple supposed to be willing volunteers (Ex. 35:21), but he used pagans to build the sacred temple of Yahweh. Likewise, he disobeyed Yahweh and did not exterminate the Canaanites (Deut. 7:2; 20:17) but choose to enslave them instead for his own gain. Their mention, along with the mention of Pharaoh's daughter, serves to prepare the reader for Solomon's downfall.

9:25-28 The narrator's mention of Solomon's sacrifices to Yahweh seems to make the point that Solomon thought that his sacrifices were all that were necessary to cover his sins or oppression over the people. This is reinforced by the fact that Solomon built a navy and Hiram king of Tyre sent Solomon even more gold, 31,500 pounds of gold. Building a navy is also a violation of the Deuteronomic regulations for the king in that the king was not allowed to collect horses, which meant that the king was not to build a military (Deut. 17:16).

10:3 The queen of Sheba may have been from south Arabia or Ethiopia in Africa. Solomon's wisdom had spread far, and she came to hear if the stories were true. She brought large quantities of gold, gems, spices, etc. She tested Solomon and was impressed with his answers to her questions.

10:4-13 When the Queen of Sheba made her observations, she stated that she was impressed with his wisdom, but mostly with his wealth, attendants, and with everything that he had, and had built for himself. The emphasis of the queen of Sheba was on the benefit that Solomon's wisdom had brought to him and his royal court and not how it had benefited the people. Solomon was no longer using Yahweh's gift of wisdom to glorify Yahweh but to glorify himself. Solomon knew all the answers, but he is no longer asking the right questions.

The queen of Sheba gave Solomon 9,000 pounds of gold and such a large amount of spice that no one had ever been able to match it. Hiram king of Tyre also brought Solomon even more gold and wealth. Solomon then sent the queen of Sheba home with lots of wealth. This was the wealthy making the wealthy wealthier.

10:14-25 Once again it is mentioned that Solomon received gold. Solomon received 50,000 pounds of gold each year, not including what he received from merchants, traders, and gifts from other kings. That means that his gold came from the taxing of his own people. Then he made hundreds of gold shields to hang in his palace just to show off his wealth. In addition to this he made a throne of ivory and gold to focus the attention on himself in the palace. Everything he used was made of gold. Once again, the gold that Hiram king of Tyre brought him is mentioned. Every year people from all around the world came to see the wisdom and wealth of Solomon, not Yahweh.

10:26-29 In addition to all the gold, Solomon accumulated 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses from Egypt. This was a direct violation of the Deuteronomic regulations for the king that specifically said the king could not go to Egypt to get horses (Deut. 17:17). Solomon continuously walked outside the commands of Yahweh and made the kingdom about himself. He was not submitting to Yahweh as the sovereign king of creation.

11:1-8 The narrator comes to the climax of Solomon's disobedience against Yahweh. Solomon had collected 700 wives 300 concubines. This was a violation of the Deuteronomic regulations for the king (Deut. 17:17). In addition, he married women from other nations that Yahweh had forbidden the Israelites to intermarry with because the idolatry of the women's religions would lead the Israelites away from Yahweh. These marriages represented treaties with other nations, which meant that Solomon was not trusting Yahweh to protect his borders, but he was trusting his political alliance with pagan nations to protect his borders.

The verbs "loved" and "held fast" used of Solomon's love for his wives are to be understood in light of their usage in Deuteronomy (Deut. 6:5; 10:12, 20; 11:1, 22; 13:4; 30:20) where they speak of unwavering loyalty to Yahweh. Yet Solomon gave his unwavering love to his pagan wives. As a result, they turned his heart away from Yahweh and towards their detestable pagan gods. And unlike his father David, Solomon was not a man who had a heart for Yahweh. Though David was prideful, sinful, and disobeyed Yahweh on many occasions, he never worshiped other gods and never had a divided heart.

"The narrative turns from Solomon's love for the Lord (3:3; see Deut. 6:5), as God had loved him (2 Sam. 12:24), to his love for foreign wives (vv. 1-2); these two references bracket the reign of Solomon. This is a love story gone awry. God's continuing love does not overwhelm Solomon's decision to turn his love toward that which is not God, to violate his own call for complete devotion to God (8:61)."¹⁶

11:9-13 Therefore, Yahweh was angry with Solomon and brought judgment on Solomon. Yahweh's judgment was that He was going to rip the kingdom away from Solomon just as He had done with Saul (1 Sam. 15). However, because of Yahweh's covenant faithfulness (2 Sam. 7:8-16)—unlike Solomon's unfaithfulness—He was going to allow Solomon and his descendants to retain kingship over the tribe of Judah and He would wait to split the kingdom after Solomon's death. Here Yahweh reveals His commitment to His Mosaic Covenant to punish disobedience and His commitment to the unconditional Davidic Covenant to make David's line kings over Israel. Yahweh's grace was more than anyone had any right to expect under the Law.

11:14-22 As judgment, Yahweh raised up adversaries against Solomon in order to tear the kingdom from him. Solomon had previously claimed he was without adversary (1 Kgs. 5:4). Now with the divine blessing removed, peace in the kingdom was gone and adversaries abound. Hadad the Edomite was the first to oppose Solomon. Hadad was a victim of David's wars and Joab's violence (2 Sam. 8:13-14). Hadad had escaped to Egypt with his life after Joab had killed all the Edomite men. Pharaoh gave him refuge until David and Joab had died. The text does not say, but the assumption is that Hadad's return to Edom was for the purpose of attacking Solomon. The mention of Egypt's role could be a comment on how Solomon had unwisely treated the Pharaoh as a friend (1 Kgs. 3:1). The second adversary was Rezon who had apparently escaped from David's battles in 2 Sam. 8:3-4. He raised a band of men in Damascus and caused problems for Solomon for the remainder of his life.

11:26-28 The third adversary was Jeroboam whose rebellion is left unexplored in favor of the prophetic word given to him. Jeroboam was from the tribe of Ephraim. Ephraim was the youngest son of Joseph who was blessed with the firstborn's blessing of headship (rulership). Now this tribe was going to receive kingship through Jeroboam. Solomon respected Jeroboam

¹⁶ Terence E. Fretheim. *First and Second Kings*, p. 62.

and made him the foreman over all the labor force of the tribe Joseph, which were the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. This would mean that Jeroboam would have had first-hand experience with Solomon's oppression of the labor force.

11:29-40 One day Ahijah the prophet of Yahweh came to Jeroboam and took his new cloak and ripped it into twelve pieces, for the twelve tribes of Israel, and gave ten pieces to Jeroboam. This metaphorical picture is related to the rejection of Saul in 1 Sam. 15. Then Ahijah told Jeroboam what Yahweh had told Solomon, that Yahweh was going to tear the tribes of Israel away from Solomon but allow Solomon to keep one tribe because of Yahweh's promise to David. Yahweh was doing this because of Solomon's idolatry.

Yahweh was then going to give ten tribes to Jeroboam to rule over. Yahweh then told Jeroboam if he obeyed Yahweh's commands, as David had, then He would make a covenant with Jeroboam, like he did with David that would make his descendants kings forever. All Jeroboam had to do was follow and obey Yahweh and his dynasty would forever be secure. Then Yahweh added a new piece of information that this divided kingdom would not last forever, but would He restore it one day.

The math of Yahweh giving David's line one tribe and Jeroboam ten tribes does not add up. There were thirteen tribes of Israel (Gen. 48-49). Levi is not counted when it comes to land, politics, and military, so that leaves twelve tribes. Therefore, there was one tribe unaccounted for. It may be the tribe of Simeon whom Jacob did not give land to (Gen. 49) and was eventually absorbed into the tribe of Judah (Josh. 19:1-9). Or it could be the tribe of Benjamin who seems to be associated politically with the tribe of Judah at different times after the split of the kingdom (1 Kgs. 12:21; 2 Chr. 11:12; 14:8; 15:2; 25:5; 34:2).

Why Solomon turned against Jeroboam is not clear. But when Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, Jeroboam fled to Egypt for safety. The fact that Jeroboam went to Egypt, which was forbidden by Yahweh, shows that he was not trusting in Yahweh as Ahijah had told him to do and foreshadows the failure of his kingship (Lev. 18:12; Deut. 17:16; Isa. 31:1-7; Jer. 42:13-17).

11:29-40 These verses summarize the end of Solomon's life and reign. The elements here of length and place of reign, burial, and succession will be details provided at the end of the lives of the kings to follow. Notice that the narrator states that Solomon showed wisdom in all he did. The wisdom of Yahweh without obedience was not enough to bring Yahweh's blessings. Just because one receives the gifts of Yahweh does not mean having them will bring the favor and blessing of Yahweh. Only a heart that pursues Yahweh and is obedient to Him brings His favor and blessing. Nor does having Yahweh's gifts mean that one will be obedient to Yahweh.

II. The Kingdom Divides (12:1-16:34)

This division tells of how the kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms. This tracks the early kings of both Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom) as they immediately went into idolatry and rebelled against Yahweh after the split. The point is that Israel and Judah from the very beginning were already on their way to exile. It was just a matter of time.

A. The Reigns of Jeroboam and Rehoboam (12:1-14:31)

From beginning to end, this section dwells on the theme of the fulfillment of the word of Yahweh in its due time. Even when the prophet fails, nothing stops Yahweh's word from being fulfilled and His plan for His people from going forth. The narrator spends more time on Jeroboam who immediately established a rival religion to Yahweh's in a way that no other person ever had in Israel. Thus, he would bring a new level of idolatry into Israel that was not present in Judah. Therefore, he brought a greater judgment upon himself, which then served as a warning to all the kings that followed him.

12:1-5 Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, decided to have his coronation in Shechem. This was a wise decision since it was centrally located in Israel, in the region of the ten northern tribes that were in unrest, and the city had a long history of significantly spiritual events happening there. Like Moses, when Jeroboam heard that there was a new king he came back and led the people in asking for relief from under the harsh oppression of Rehoboam's father (Ex. 1:14; 2:23). If Rehoboam gave them relief, they would remain united with Judah and be loyal to him as king. Rehoboam asked for three days to think about it.

12:6-11 First Rehoboam consulted the older and more experienced advisors of Solomon. They were old and Solomon was dead, and they had nothing to lose in not trying to make the king happy with their advice. They advised Rehoboam to show mercy and free the people from the oppression and said that as a result the people would be loyal to him. But Rehoboam rejected their wisdom and consulted the young advisors who had grown up with him. Rehoboam was 41 years old at this time (1 Kgs. 14:21) and these were his friends who he grew up with, so they were hardly "young men." The Hebrew word *yeladin* used of them most often refers to "children." The narrator seems to be referring more to their juvenile way of thinking rather than their biological age. To the older advisors he asked for their advice. But to the younger he asked, "How should we answer these people." The "we" suggest a unity with the younger advisors and a pre-determined commitment to not grant the request of the people. The king's heart was hard just as Pharaoh's heart had been hard (Ex. 7:13). The young advisors said that Rehoboam must not let the people see him as weak and should oppress them even harder so that they would fear him and never rebel. This is horrible advice, for oppression is exactly what leads to rebellion.

The phrase 'my little finger is thicker than my father's loins' is literally in the Hebrew "my little one is thicker than my father's loins." There is nothing in the context that suggests that the "little one" is his pinky finger, as is assumed by the translators. In the ancient near east, the loins often referred to the fertility of the individual. Given this, the "little one" may be a reference to his male genitals. This understanding would fit the context and attitude of Rehoboam.¹⁷ If so, he would be saying, essentially, in a lewd way that he was more of man and harsher than his father. "If you thought my father was bad, wait 'til you get a load of me." The "scorpion," that he would

¹⁷ See Iain W. Provan. *1 and 2 Kings*, p. 107.

whip them with was a vicious whip that was made with sharp pieces of metal (1 Macc. 6:51). This is the immature need to look strong and macho in order to gain the respect of others. This is more in line with Adonijah's thinking than the advice of David to Solomon (1 Kgs. 2:2-4).

12:12-17 Rehoboam returned to the people to inform them that he would be harsher than his father ever had been. The narrator states that his decision here was from Yahweh who wanted the kingdom to divide. Once again, one can see the providence of Yahweh and the choices of people existing simultaneously in historical events. Jeroboam was the legitimate king, according to Yahweh, and is portrayed as the new Moses ready to lead the people from the new Pharaoh and Egypt. The people said that they had no part in the house of David, which is what Sheba had said when he rebelled against David (2 Sam. 20:1). The northern tribes abandoned Rehoboam's kingship, but Judah remained under his rule.

12:18-24 Rehoboam tried to enforce his rule by sending Adoniram, the head foreman, to oppress the people, but they only killed him and rebelled. Rehoboam managed to escape on his chariot. Having a chariot was a violation of the Deuteronomic regulation for the king (Deut. 17:14-20). Like Pharaoh of Egypt, Rehoboam gathered together the armies of Judah and Benjamin and went to war against his own people. But Yahweh sent His prophetic word through Shemaiah the man of God (prophet) to stop Rehoboam from attacking the northern tribes. The narrator does not state why Rehoboam obeyed but he did return home.

Israel was now a new kingdom, consisting of the ten northern tribes. The tribe of Judah became the southern kingdom. From this point on the name "Israel" no longer refers to the all the tribes of Israel or all the land but only the northern ten tribes. And Judah refers to the tribe of Judah and it seems at times the tribe of Benjamin (1 Kgs. 12:21; 2 Chr. 11:12; 14:8; 15:2; 25:5; 34:2).

12:25-31 The first thing that Jeroboam did when he became king of Israel (northern kingdom) was make Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim his capital. Jeroboam knew that though the northern tribes belonged to him the people would still have to cross the southern border into Judah (southern kingdom) in order to worship Yahweh in the temple. Fearing that as they continuously traveled to the temple in Judah, they would see Judah as the true kingdom of Yahweh, they would want to rejoin Judah and he would lose his kingship.

After seeking advice from his advisors, rather than Yahweh, he decided to build two golden calves. He put one in Bethel, which was just north of Jerusalem, so that his people would not have to go into Judah. He put the other in Dan, which was in the northern part of his kingdom, so that they would not have to travel through the entire nation to go to an altar. He then declared to his people "Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt," which was a quote from the people of Israel when they built the golden calf in the wilderness after their exodus (Ex. 32:4). Where Jeroboam had returned from Egypt in the role of Moses, now he is cast in the role of Aaron building the golden calves.¹⁸ He had repeated one of the worst sins in Israelite history. The problem was that Jeroboam was not convinced of the promise of Yahweh to make him king and establish his descendants forever (1 Kgs. 11:29-40).

Second, Jeroboam built a "house of high places," which is in contrast to the house of Yahweh in 1 Kgs. 12:27. Third, he appointed non-Levitical priests, which was a violation of Deut. 18:1-8. Third, he established a festival to his gods on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, which rivaled the Passover Festival (celebrating the exodus of Israel) on the fourteenth day of the seventh

¹⁸ See Moses Aberbach and Leivy Smolar. "Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves,"

month. This was all a violation of Deut. 12 and Jeroboam showed himself to be no different than Solomon. As a result of this rival religion many Levitical priests left Israel and moved to Judah (2 Chr. 11:13-17).

13:1-3 The core of narrative in 1 Kgs. 13-14 is that Yahweh brings a prophetic word that is fulfilled. The narrator emphasizes that it was the word of Yahweh that sent the prophet. Jeroboam had become the new Pharaoh and the man of God (prophet) had become the new Moses. “The man of God” and “the prophet” are two terms used interchangeably (Moses [Deut. 33:1; 34:10], Elijah [1 Kgs. 17:18; 18:22], and Elisha [2 Kgs. 3:11; 5:8]). In the presence of Jeroboam, the prophet prophesied against the pagan altar saying that one day the Davidic king Josiah would sacrifice the priests of the golden calves and burn their bodies and bones on this altar. To be left unburied in the ancient world was a curse that would follow the person into the afterlife. The point is that the golden calf religion would be destroyed and all those who led its worship would be judged. Josiah would fulfill this prophecy in 2 Kgs. 23:15-20. The man of God also gave the sign of the altar immediately cracking open and its ashes pouring out on the ground. Every long-term prophecy must be validated by an immediate sign to validate the prophet and his prophecy.

13:4-10 Jeroboam stretched out his hand and commanded that the man of God be seized and executed. This was a direct rebellion against Yahweh, for Jeroboam was commanding the death of Yahweh’s representative and His word. Immediately after he said this, his arm, representing authority, shriveled up and petrified, just like the changing wooden staff of Moses. At the same time the altar split open and its ashes poured out just as the man of God had said. Jeroboam had gone head to head with Yahweh and had miserably failed. Humbled and recognizing the true power of Yahweh (in contrast to his failed gods) to protect him, he asked for the prophet to pray to Yahweh for his healing. Amazingly Yahweh showed him mercy and healed him even though he did not repent and would later show no remorse or change in his actions.

Jeroboam then asked the man of God to come and eat with him. Jeroboam realized that he was no match for the power of Yahweh and so probably hoped that he could finesse and entice the prophet into blessing him instead. In the ancient Near East, it was often believed that the prophet himself had the power to bend the will of the gods. The man of God refused, for Yahweh had commanded him to eat with no one and return a different way than the way that he had come. In the ancient Near East meals were associated with covenants, so it may have given the wrong impression to people if the man of God, representing Yahweh, was eating with the king who had just been condemned by Yahweh.

13:11-19 The narrator never states whether this old prophet was legitimate or a false prophet. Yet, Bethel had turned into the hub of idolatry with the golden calf worship, so the old prophet who was from Bethel was mostly likely connected to the golden calf worship and thus had just been condemned by Yahweh. When his sons told the old prophet what had happened he went out to meet the man of God. He invited the man of God to eat with him, probably for the same reason that Jeroboam had invited him. The man of God told the old prophet that Yahweh had told him that he could not, but when he repeated Yahweh’s command it was without the imperatives.

The old prophet deceptively told the man of God that he was a prophet of Yahweh and that an angel had told him to bring the man of God back with him. The man of God disobeyed Yahweh and went with him. The mistake that he made was not just his disobedience but also not asking

for a sign of validation. The reason for the old prophet's deception is not mentioned, but obedience to the word of Yahweh is the emphasis.

13:20-32 While they were eating the word of Yahweh came to the old prophet of Bethel and condemned the man of God for his disobedience. His judgment was that his body would not be buried in the tomb of his ancestors. By Yahweh speaking through the old prophet He shows that He can use anyone He wants for His purposes. When the man of God was done eating, he left, and a lion killed him but did not kill the donkey. The fact that the lion killed the man of God, but not the donkey, which goes against its natural nature, shows that it was a supernatural act of Yahweh.

The old prophet retrieved the man of God's body and buried him in his own tomb fulfilling the word of Yahweh that he would not be buried with his ancestors. The old prophet then gave his sons instructions to bury him with the man of God when he died. He was probably hoping that the man of God's body would somehow protect him from the judgment of Yahweh. Even though the man of God was judged by Yahweh, he had been a faithful servant, so Yahweh prevented his body from being eaten, which would have been seen as a disgrace by the people (Deut. 28:58-68; Ps. 102:23; Isa. 65:20). To be left unburied would have been seen as loss of participation in the covenant (Deut. 28:26; 1 Sam. 31:8-13). The point is that Yahweh killed even the prophet for his disobedience. If the prophets cannot escape the judgment of Yahweh, then certainly kings cannot either.

13:33-34 Even after this Jeroboam still did not change his ways and continued to oppose Yahweh through his rival priesthood. This lack of repentance and continued disobedience was what led to his destruction.

14:1-4a Soon after this, Jeroboam's son Abijah became ill. Jeroboam wanted to seek out Ahijah, the prophet of Yahweh who had appointed him as king, to heal his son. The irony is that though he worshiped other gods he did not go to them for his son's healing. Deep down inside he knew that Yahweh is the true God. However, he knew that Ahijah was not likely to help him, so he sent his disguised wife instead. He hoped to deceive the prophet of Yahweh and gain his sympathy with a mourning mother.

14:4b-9 Even though Ahijah was blind he did not need to see for Yahweh spoke to him and revealed the deception of Jeroboam's wife before she ever arrived. So, before she could even knock on his door, he called out to her as Jeroboam's wife.

Yahweh's word to Jeroboam was that He had made Jeroboam king and despite that Jeroboam had not been faithful like David and had rebelled against Yahweh. In fact, he had done more evil than any other leader of Israel before him had done. His house was no better than the dung that people burn, which is a derogatory imagery of disgust. Therefore, Yahweh would exterminate the entire house of Jeroboam by killing all the males in his household. Being eaten by dogs and birds is a way of saying that they would not be buried in the land, which would have been seen as exclusion from the covenant promises of Yahweh (Deut. 28:58-68; Ps. 102:23; Isa. 65:20). This judgment stands in contrast to the promise of 2 Sam. 7:10-16 that Yahweh made to the house of David. This is why Yahweh was lenient with Solomon and Rehoboam for their idolatry compared to Jeroboam's judgment.

The validating sign and the beginning of the judgment was that when the mother returned home her son Abijah would die. Ahijah called Abijah "a child" (*yeled*), which is a term applied to both

infants, toddlers (Gen. 21:8; Ex. 2:3; Ruth 4:16; 1 Kgs. 3:25), older children, and grown men (Ruth 1:5; 2 Kgs. 4:18). The narrator and Jeroboam refer to Abijah as a “boy” (*na’ar*), which is a limited term used of adolescent boys and men (Gen. 22:12; Judg. 8:20; 1 Sam. 20:21; 2 Sam. 18:5).¹⁹ Most likely Ahijah was old enough to be responsible for his own choices, thus the judgment on his life. Yet he would be the only one who would be buried.

The judgment on Jeroboam was so harsh because he was the chosen king of Israel, meant to be the image of God to Israel and the world. He was given a great responsibility and so was held to a high standard. His position influenced an entire nation as he led them into idolatry. Therefore, he was also held accountable for the way he influenced others. His family was included in the judgment because they were the royal officials who joined him in leading the nation. This also insured that the cycle of their immorality was broken with their deaths. When Jeroboam’s wife returned home her son died just as Yahweh had declared.

14:10-18 Yahweh then declared that He would allow a new king from another family to exterminate Jeroboam’s family. Yahweh also declared that He would uproot Israel (northern kingdom) and carry them off into exile to Mesopotamia because of their idolatry. This makes it clear that all of Israel was guilty along with the family of Jeroboam. This is the first time that Yahweh had officially declared that the exile was in fact coming for Israel. The two specific reasons given here for the coming exile are the making of Asherah poles and the sins of Jeroboam (golden calves), sins in which the following kings of Israel would continue.

14:19-20 Each king’s reign is concluded with a closing summary of their reign. The narrator concludes by mentioning that the rest of their accomplishments and details about the king’s reign could be found in other books and records that were available to the people of his day. He has left this extra information about the kings’ reigns out because it was not important for his theological purpose. Then, in most cases when there is no assignation of the king, the name of the king’s son who succeeds him is cited.

Jeroboam’s summary also includes the length of his reign, which is typically found in the introduction to the king’s reign, because his reign began in the midst of the narrative of Solomon’s end, where an opening summary did not fit. Jeroboam’s reign is concluded, and he was succeeded by his son Nadab (1 Kgs. 16:25-32).

14:21 Rehoboam’s reign begins with the customary opening summary for the king’s reign. With the exception of Jeroboam, all king’s reigns are bracketed with opening and closing summaries. Specific information is included in the opening summaries. First, the king’s accession date is provided, synchronized with the northern or southern counterpart. For the kings of Judah (southern kingdom), their age at their accession is provided, with the exceptions of Abijah (1 Kgs. 15:1-2) and Asa (1 Kgs. 15:9-10). Then the length and place of their reign is provided. Also, for the kings of Judah the name of the queen mother is cited, with the exception of Jehoram (2 Kgs. 8:16-17) and Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16:1-4). The opening summary concludes with a theological evaluation of the king’s worship practices. The kings of Israel are often compared to Jeroboam and the kings of Judah are often compared to David.

¹⁹ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 201.

Even though the narrator has already discussed the reign of Rehoboam, it was in the context of the narrative of the kingdom splitting and the reason for Jeroboam's reign. Now the narrator specifically focuses on Rehoboam's reign.

14:22-24 The narrator states that all of Judah had done evil in the eyes of Yahweh. They established high places to the gods, sacred pillars, and Asherah poles all throughout Judah. The sacred pillars or stones (*matstsebah*) were associated with Baal (which means "lord") the chief god of Phoenicia and Canaan. They worshiped him as the sun and storm god who enabled crops to grow and people to produce children. Baal's consorts were Asherah, a fertility goddess associated with the moon and stars, and Anath, a goddess of love and war.

Asherah was the name of the chief female goddess worshiped in Phoenicia and Canaan. The Phoenicians called her Astarte and the Assyrians called her Ishtar. They worshiped her as the moon goddess of fertility. Asherah was portrayed by a limbless tree trunk planted in the ground or a stone idol (teraphim), which was carved into a symbolic representation of the goddess. Because her likeness was usually carved into trees, the places of her worship were often called "groves." In the Bible she is also called "Ashtoreth" (Judg. 2:13; 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:3-4; 12:10; 31:10; 1 Kgs. 11:5, 33; 2 Kgs. 23:13), which derogatorily combines the name Astarte with the vowels of the Hebrew noun "shame" (*boset*).

Baal and Asherah are often paired together in the Bible (Judg. 3:7; 6:25-32; 1 Sam. 7:4, 12:10; 1 Kgs. 16:32-33; 18:19; 2 Kgs. 17:16; 21:3) and were often worshiped by the Israelites alongside Yahweh. Baal may have been syncretized with Yahweh and Asherah may have been considered His consort. They were both worshiped through sexual rituals involving temple prostitution and often human sacrifices. The worship of both of them was prohibited by Yahweh (Deut. 7:5; 12:3; 16:21-22).²⁰

14:25-28 Shishak's (Shoshenq I, 945-924 BC) attack on Jerusalem was a direct prophecy given to Rehoboam by Shemaiah the prophet for his sin (2 Chr. 12:5-11). Shishak was the king who had given Jeroboam refuge when he fled Solomon (1 Kgs. 11:40). He was a very powerful and effective ruler, and his military campaign in Syria gained him 156 cities in Judah, Israel, Edom, and Philistia. Shishak's campaign was the first serious attack against Judah by any foreign power since Saul's days. The great wealth and power of the reigns of David and Solomon were now over.

14:29-31 The narrator gives the concluding summary of Rehoboam's reign. He states that there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all throughout their reigns. Even though Rehoboam initially obeyed the word of Yahweh not to attack Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 12:22-24), it seems that he later ignored it. This warfare would continue between the following kings of Israel and Judah for 57 years (931-874 BC; 1 Kgs. 12:1-16:28). Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijah (1 Kgs. 15:1-8).

²⁰ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, pp. 204-205



B. The Reigns of the Early Kings of Israel and Judah (15:1-16:34)

These chapters cover twenty years of Israel and Judah's history. The narrator will first develop the theological history of the kings of Judah and then the kings of Israel. Though Judah had ungodly kings and went into idolatry just as Israel did during this time, they did have the godly king Asa who brought reform and greater stability to Judah compared to the political instability that Israel had. The major theme here is Yahweh's control over history. Kings may think that Yahweh is not or should not be involved in politics, but Yahweh is involved, directing their affairs as the true sovereign king.

15:1-15 Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, reigned over Judah for three years during the reign of Jeroboam, king of Israel. In most Hebrew manuscripts his name is Abijam, which means "my father is Yam," a reference to the Ugaritic sea god. In 2 Chr. 13:1 his name is "Abijah," meaning "my father is Yah(weh)." This is an ideological change by the narrator of the book of Kings. He committed all the sins of his father and he was not devoted to Yahweh like David before him was. The narrator makes it clear that the only reason his line would continue despite his idolatry was because of the covenant that Yahweh had made with David (2 Sam. 7:10-16). David serves as a paradigm for the kings of Judah (1 Kgs. 11:33, 28; 14:8; 15:11; 22:43; 2 Kgs. 10:30; 12:2; 14:3; 15:3, 34; 16:2; 18:3; 22:2). His paradigm value is not dependent on a perfect life, but as one oriented to Yahweh's ways, especially regarding worship.²¹ Warfare continued between Israel and Judah during the reign of Abijah. When he died, he was succeeded by his son Asa (1 Kgs. 15:9-24).

15:9-15 Asa, the son of Abijah, reigned over Judah for forty-one years during the reign of Jeroboam, the king of Israel. Unlike most of the kings, his age at the time he began to reign is not mentioned. Asa did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh as David had before him and was the first of eight kings of Judah whom the narrator judged as good. He removed all the temple prostitutes, idols, and cut down the Asherah poles in the land. The mention of him deposing his grandmother Maaka must mean that she was incredibly evil and had significant power in the kingdom. However, he did not remove the high places. This is a mark against him as king that would be true of most of the kings of Judah. The removal of the idols but not the high places suggests that they were used for the worship of Yahweh. Or the people continued to privately worship the pagan gods there since it would have been impossible to regulate the worship there. This was one of the reasons for having one place of worship, so that it could be regulated by the Levitical priesthood. Asa was devoted to Yahweh and tithed his silver and gold to the temple.

15:16-22 Baasha became king of Israel (northern kingdom) in Asa's second year. Baasha strategically fortified Ramah, which was about five miles north of Jerusalem. The city's location on major travel routes gave it control over the region and its fortification presented a serious threat to Judah.²² In desperation Asa took all the silver and gold from the temple treasuries (that he had previously put there) and sent it to Ben Hadad I, the king of Aram, seeking an alliance. The word "gift" (*sohad*) is used in legal contexts as a bribe (Ex. 23:8; Deut. 10:17; 16:19; 1 Sam. 8:3; Ezek. 22:12). Asa did not go to Yahweh for help nor trusted him for the protection of his borders. Instead he made a treaty with a pagan king with the money he took from Yahweh's temple. As a result of Ben Hadad I getting more money from Asa than he did from Baasha, he

²¹ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 211

²² See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 212.

broke his treaty with Baasha and conquered the northern cities of Israel. Asa's plan worked and Baasha retreated. Yet in the end it did not matter because he did not trust Yahweh. Asa then had his people tear down the fortification at Ramah and fortify Geba.

15:23-24 The narrator gives the closing summary of Asa's reign. Here he adds that Asa's feet became diseased, most likely as judgment from Yahweh because of his lack of trust in Yahweh. When he died, he was succeeded by his son Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs. 22:41-50). It would be a while before the narrator gets to Jehoshaphat's reign because Asa's reign was so long compared to the many short reigns of the kings of Israel that would now be covered.

15:25-32 The narrator now shifts to the kings of Israel. Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, reigned over Judah for two years during the reign of Asa, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh just as his father Jeroboam did. Baasha from the tribe of Issachar killed Nadab and made himself king of Israel. He then exterminated the entire family of Jeroboam, which fulfilled the word of Yahweh spoken against Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 14:10-14). Even though Baasha fulfilled the word of Yahweh, what he did was evil, and he would be held accountable for it (see 1 Kgs. 16:7). Nadab's summary omits the notice of death, burial, and succeeding son, for the sinful dynasty had come to an end in fulfillment of the prophetic word.

15:33-34 Baasha, the son of Ahijah, reigned over Israel for twenty-four years during the reign of Asa, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Jeroboam. Baasha's capital was Tirzah, which Jeroboam had made the new capital of Israel at the end of his reign (1 Kgs. 14:17). Tirzah was an old Canaanite city originally captured by Joshua (Josh. 12:24). It remained the capital of Israel until King Omri purchased and made Samaria the capital (1 Kgs. 15:33; 16:8, 15, 23). It was about seven miles northeast of Shechem and stood on a rocky ridge. It commanded the main thoroughfare through the Jordan Valley to the western mountain district, and the major north-south route from Beth-Shan to Shechem. The city's location enabled easy communication and troop movement during the years of warfare with Asa and Ben Hadad I.²³

16:1-7 Yahweh sent Jehu the prophet to prophecy against Baasha, who had not been appointed by Yahweh or the people. Yahweh said that He had lifted him "up from the dust," an image of cursing after the fall (Gen. 3:19) and probably a reference to Baasha's usurping of Jeroboam's family (1 Kgs. 15:27-28).²⁴ Baasha's house was also going to be exterminated for committing the same sins as Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 14:10-11). Nothing else is worth mentioning about Baasha's reign. When he died, he was succeeded by his son Elah (1 Kgs. 16:8-14).

The narrator then adds the second reason for Yahweh's prophecy against the house of Baasha. It was because he destroyed the house of Jeroboam, without permission from Yahweh. Yahweh had prophesied and wanted the house of Jeroboam to be exterminated but it was evil for Baasha to do it himself. Baasha never was commanded by Yahweh to do it and he certainly did not do it for the glory of Yahweh. He killed the family of Jeroboam for his own greed and power. Yahweh could have removed the house of Jeroboam through other means or used a pagan nation that was already under His judgment. Baasha was held responsible for the sins of his desires and actions regardless of whether Yahweh said it must happen or not. What he did was selfish and evil.

²³ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 213.

²⁴ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 221.

“Besides providing information on Baasha’s death, these verses [16:5-7] reemphasize the author’s theological approach to history. Three issues deserve mention. First, God’s word dictates history, a fact Jehu’s prophetic rebuke and prediction divulges. Second, Jeroboam and Baasha are judged unfavorably because they use their God-given political authority to preserve their own position rather than to glorify God among the people. Third, the text stresses cause and effect, not fatalistic determinism. God gives both Jeroboam and Baasha the opportunity to follow the covenant. Baasha eliminates Jeroboam’s family, as God said would happen, yet becomes like Jeroboam, which makes him a murderer, not a reformer.”²⁵

16:8-14 Elah, the son of Baasha, reigned over Israel for two years during the reign of Asa, the king of Judah. Zimri, the commander of Elah’s chariots, killed Elah while he was drunk and defenseless and made himself king of Israel. Just like Jeroboam’s house, Baasha’s house was now being exterminated according to the word of Yahweh. However, the circumstance here are more pathetic for at least Nadab, the last son of Jeroboam’s line, was fighting the Philistines when he was killed by the new dynasty (1 Kgs. 15:27), but Elah was getting drunk when he was killed. Not only that, Elah was betrayed and killed by one of his own commanders. Zimri as the commander of the chariots shows that Deut. 17:16 was continuously being deliberately disregarded by the kings. Zimri continued his assault by killing all of those in Baasha’s house, fulfilling the word of Yahweh (1 Kgs. 16:1-4, 7). Elah’s summary omits the notice of death, burial, and succeeding son, for the sinful dynasty had come to an end in fulfillment of the prophetic word.

16:15-20 Zimri reigned over Israel for seven days during the reign of Asa, the king of Judah. When the army of Israel had heard what Zimri had done, they proclaimed Omri, the commander of the army, as their new king. Before this time Omri had been at Gibbethon continuing the assault against the Philistines that Nadab had begun (1 Kgs. 15:27) but abandoned the siege to take the throne from Zimri. This is a subtle note of condemnation by the narrator.

“Twenty-four years of siege warfare ends with Israel walking away from the battle, and they never return. Gibbethon is never again mentioned in Kings or in the rest of the Old Testament, and the text leaves us with the distinct impression that Gibbethon remains forever in the hands of the Philistines. Twenty-four years of supplies, death, and blood – all wasted. From the Philistine perspective, Gibbethon is saved because there are many princes in Israel. It happened before: while Saul chases David around the country, the Philistines seize the opportunity to make inroads into Israel, unprotected by its distracted king (1 Sm 23). When the people of God battle among themselves, Gentiles recover territory.”²⁶

Zimri knew that he could not win and fearing what would be done to him if he were captured, he burned the palace down with himself in it. He died in judgment for committing the same sins as Jeroboam and for destroying the house of Baasha. Zimri’s summary omits the notice of death, burial, and succeeding son.

16:21-22 After Zimri’s death, another army commander, Tibni, rose to power with many followers and opposed Omri. Israel was thrown into a civil war that divided the people of Yahweh even more. But over time Omri won and became king. The rapid sequence of these events emphasizes the instability of the throne and the nation. With assassinations in the

²⁵ Paul R. House. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 200.

²⁶ Peter Leithart. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 118.

government, all of Israel would have been in chaos and filled with fear. This was the fruit of their disregard for Yahweh.

16:23-28 Omri reigned over Israel for twelve years during the reign of Asa, the king of Judah. Omri is mentioned outside the Bible as building a powerful dynasty. He was a king who brought stability to Israel. Omri's powerful house became synonymous with Israel even after his dynasty came to an end. Assyrian inscriptions of the Assyrian kings Tiglath-Pileser III and Shalmaneser IV in the ninth to eighth centuries attest to Israel as the "house of Omri." Even Jehu, who overthrew the Omrides, was called a "son of Omri (ANET 282, 284).²⁷ Omri purchased Samaria as his new capital, a site exceedingly defensible, standing 299 feet above the surrounding valley. Its Hebrew name is Hill of Someron, which is "Watch-mountain."²⁸

"Omri was probably the most capable king Israel had enjoyed since the division of the kingdom. Assyrian records refer to Israel as 'the land of Omri.' His influence extended far. He defeated the Moabites, the record of which constitutes one of the inscriptions on the famous Moabite Stone. He also made a treaty with Ethbaal, king of Tyre and Sidon (887-856 B.C.), that involved the marriage of his son, Ahab, and Ethbaal's daughter, Jezebel... Still the writer of kings did not mention these strengths, only the fact that he was the worst king Israel had had spiritually (v. 25). He was very bad because he personally followed Jeroboam's cult and caused the people to sin by allowing it to flourish in Israel."²⁹

Omri also did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Jeroboam. Omri brought a whole new level of evil when he did *more* evil than all those before him. No prophecy of judgment was brought directly against Omri since he did not kill the previous family before him, for Zimri had killed himself. But Yahweh's judgment would not delay long for He would send his prophet to Omri's son, Ahab for their sins. When Omri died, he was succeeded by his son Ahab (1 Kgs. 16:29-22:40). Notice that five kings of Israel have reigned during the time of Asa, king of Judah's reign. Asa was godly man and was blessed with a long reign (although long reigns do not always mean that the king was godly). In contrast, Israel's ungodly kings plunged the kingdom into idolatry, political assassinations, civil wars, and instability.

16:29-32 Ahab, the son of Omri, reigned over Israel for twenty-two years during the reign of Asa, the king of Judah. Ahab also did *more* evil than all those that came before him, including Jeroboam and his father Omri. First, he committed the sins of Jeroboam with no remorse. Second, he married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians and made Baal the most prominent god in Israel. Jezebel's name was originally spelled 'izebul, meaning "where is the prince." The Hebrew vocalization of 'izebel is a play upon the word "dung" (*zebel*), giving her name the meaning, "where is the dung" (2 Kgs. 9:37). Her father, EthBaal, ruled Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia for thirty-two years. His Phoenician name IttoBaal means "Baal exists." Jezebel may have been appointed priestess of Baal, the god of the storm and agricultural fertility in Phoenicia.³⁰ Jezebel was one of the most ruthless and evil characters in the Bible who specifically sought to erase Yahweh and His prophets from the land. Third, Ahab built an altar

²⁷ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 223.

²⁸ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 224.

²⁹ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on 1 Kings*, p. 55.

³⁰ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p 225.

and temple to Baal in Israel for the people to worship. Fourth, he erected Asherah poles throughout Israel. He did more to anger Yahweh than all those before him.

16:33-34 During his reign, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. His first-born son and his youngest son died when he laid the foundation to the city and built its gates. According to Josh. 6:26, Joshua put a curse on the city of Jericho against anyone who would rebuild the city against the will of Yahweh. The consequences would be the loss of two of his sons for both the rebuilding of the foundation and the setting up of the gates. The mention of Hiel's building project of Jericho right after Ahab's building project of the Baal temple links the two and shows that Ahab was also connected to the rebuilding of Jericho as a sponsor. Since the destruction of Jericho was the first victory of Joshua in the conquest, its rebuilding is a symbolic undoing of the conquest on the part of Ahab.³¹

³¹ See Keith Bodner. *Elisha's Profile in the Book of Kings*, pp. 22-23.

III. The Ministry of Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:1–2 Kgs. 2:18)

This division begins the ministry of Elijah who was sent by Yahweh to confront Ahab and Jezebel and the Baal religion. The Omride house had firmly established themselves as an apostate and political power in Israel. They had brought back and fully endorsed the Canaanite religion and practices of Baal. Their evil was marked by the fact that Joshua's conquest and David's kingdom had been completely erased by the Omrides. What these kings had built, the prophets Elijah and Elisha would deconstruct during their ministries. The idolatry and false prophets of Jeroboam's Bethel and Ahab's Jericho were the main cities that Elijah and Elisha dealt with.

Elijah and Elisha are the most unique and prominent prophets in the book of Kings. In Deut. 18:14-20 Moses declared that Yahweh would one day lift up a prophet like him who would lead the people of Israel. All throughout the Elijah narrative the narrator develops Elijah as the new Moses that Israel had awaited. There are many parallels between the life of Elijah and Moses that set him up as the new Moses. However, as the narrator develops these parallels, they will not chronologically match up with the life of Moses.

A. Elijah Confronts the Prophets of Baal (17:1-18:46)

This section focuses specifically on Elijah's conflict with Baal. Through Elijah, Yahweh would expose the ineptness of Baal as He stopped the rain and brought down fire at Mount Carmel. In 1 Kgs. 17-19, each chapter climaxes with a journey to a high place, which leads to a conversion and is resolved when Elijah descends. Each chapter has an announcement from Yahweh that leads to dual encounters, ravens and a widow, Obadiah and Ahab, an angelic being and Yahweh.³²

17:1 Elijah's name means "Yahweh is my God." Tishbe is north of the Jabbok River in Gilead (Transjordan region), which is on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Elijah is later described as being a hairy man (2 Kgs. 2:8). Elijah's roots in the Transjordan put him outside the power and influence of the Omride dynasty. All throughout the narrative, the narrator does not give any more information as to whom Elijah is. Elijah simply walked into the royal palace of Ahab, proclaimed himself a prophet, pronounced a judgment of no rain, and then left. Like Moses, Elijah came out of the wilderness and assaulted the royal and cultic power of Ahab and Baal, the new Egyptian Pharaoh and god, by bringing a plague and declaring Yahweh to be the master over the rain and the source of life.

In Deuteronomy *tal* ("dew") and *matar* ("rain") are evidence of Yahweh's covenant blessings (Deut. 33:28 [*tal*]; Deut. 11:11, 14; 28:12 [*matar*] and the absence of *matar* is the specific evidence of Yahweh's judgment on Israel when they abandon His covenant for other gods (Deut. 11:17; 28:24). Thus, Elijah's pronouncement enacts a covenant curse upon Israel because they have broken the covenant (Deut. 27-28).

Unlike previous prophets, neither the narrator nor Yahweh mentions Elijah being called by Yahweh until after he has left Ahab (1 Kgs. 17:2-3). Elijah did not even say that Yahweh had sent him, rather, he said that the rain would not return until *he* said so, not Yahweh. Normally the prophets begin their pronouncements with "thus says Yahweh." Even though Elijah is a prophet

³² See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 230.

the narrator seems to be introducing him not only as a man of great authority but also hubris. Why does he not mention that this word came from Yahweh? Does he have the right to speak this judgment? The narrator does not confirm that Elijah's word was from Yahweh until 1 Kgs. 17:7.

17:2-6 Now the word of Yahweh came to Elijah and told him to move eastward, and go to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan River and Elijah obeyed. The word "Kerith" means "cut off," which is fitting since Yahweh was *cutting off* the rain and Jezebel was going to respond by *cutting off* the prophets of Yahweh (1 Kgs. 18:4).³³ The ravens feeding Elijah was a supernatural act of Yahweh's provision, for ravens do not even feed their own young. Ravens are unclean birds (Lev. 11:15; Deut. 14:14), which points to the unclean land to which Yahweh was about to send Elijah. This shows Yahweh's willingness to work outside the normal means of ritual purity in order to accomplish His will.

Moving eastward in the Bible is an imagery of moving away from the presence of Yahweh, either through rebellion against Yahweh or against Yahweh's judgment (Gen. 3:24; 4:16; 11:2; 13:11; 28). But it was also the direction that Israel moved in the exodus out of Egypt, which is the only time it is seen as positive. But even in that context Yahweh's judgment fell upon Egypt.

In a new exodus, Elijah moved eastward out of the new Egypt across the Jordan River (the new Red Sea) and into the wilderness. Just like Moses, Yahweh provided Elijah bread, meat, and water in the wilderness (Ex. 16:8, 12-13; 17:5-7). The difference was that in this new exodus no one went with him for Israel was the new Egypt under the judgment of Yahweh, so Elijah moved eastward leaving them behind. But this was also a foreshadowing of the exile soon to come for Israel, for Elijah as the prophet symbolically represented Israel as he went into "exile." Later Yahweh would move eastward out of the land right before the Babylonians came in judgment against Judah (Ezek. 10).

17:7-12 When the brook dried up Yahweh told Elijah to go north to Sidon in Phoenicia, where a widow would feed him, and Elijah obeyed. Phoenicia was where Jezebel was from and was the heart of Baal worship. Yahweh had not only sent His prophet and His judgment against Baal in Israel but now He was going to invade and attack Baal in his own territory.

When Elijah found the widow in Sidon, he asked her for water and bread. She said that she only had enough flour and oil for one more meal for her and her son, and then they would die. The widow made it clear that Yahweh was not her God when she said, "As surely as Yahweh your God lives." As a Sidonian widow she would have believed that the death of her husband was a judgment from Baal and now she and her son were going to die because of the judgment of Yahweh.

17:13-16 Elijah asked her to give him the bread first and then make some for herself and her son. The implication is that there would miraculously be enough for all of them because of Yahweh's provision, not Baal's. This would be her first fruits offering to Yahweh as an act of trust in Him. Despite Yahweh not being her God, she obeyed Elijah's command. Perhaps she felt she was already cursed by Baal and now about to die. She had nothing to lose in trusting Elijah. And just as the word of Yahweh had promised, the flour and oil did not run out the entire time there was no rain in the land. Later the narrator will state that it was three years (1 Kgs. 18:1).

³³ See Keith Bodner. *The Theology of the Book of Kings*, p. 111.

Yahweh demonstrated that His power was greater than that of Baal by providing flour during a famine in Baal's territory, when Baal could not. Not only that, Yahweh provided flour without the natural means of rain and crops. Baal was a nature god who could only command nature. Yahweh is the creator of nature and therefore can work outside of nature, and without the means of nature.

Second, Yahweh showed His love for the foreign widow, who would have been considered by her culture as cursed and insignificant. Not only that, she could not contribute anything to the life of the community. Yahweh showed that He cared for the most "insignificant" and rejected people of the culture.

Third, Yahweh showed that even while His people (Elijah as Israel's representative) were in exile in a foreign land surrounded by foreigners, He would not abandon His people and would provide for them and the foreigners that surrounded them.

Fourth, by sending Elijah to Phoenicia, Yahweh was showing that the foreign nations were symbolically the new Israel. This does not mean that they were literally the new chosen people and Yahweh was abandoning Israel. But Israel was meant to be the righteous image of God and to be a blessing to the world. They had failed to be both. The books of Judges and Samuel have already shown that foreigners had responded better to Yahweh than the Israelites had. So, Yahweh was including the nations like He had originally intended, even though Israel was still the chosen people. This will be discussed more at the end of the book of Kings and in the prophetic books.

17:17-24 Sometime later the widow's son died and the widow blamed Elijah for the son's death. She had turned from Baal and trusted Yahweh with her and her son's well-being, and now He had failed her too. Yet the words of the widow show that her faith was focused on Elijah rather than Yahweh. It was only after a period of days that death was wholly confirmed. Elsewhere in the Bible the loss of breath describes real death (Deut. 20:16; Josh. 10:40; 11:11, 14; 1 Kgs. 15:29). Yet all that matters was that Elijah believed the child to be dead.³⁴

Elijah immediately went to Yahweh in prayer and believed that He could bring the boy back. Elijah was not given a word from Yahweh that He would do this miracle, yet Elijah expected that Yahweh would, and Yahweh did. Like Moses (Ex. 32:11-14; 33:12-23), Elijah interceded on behalf of the widow and asked for what Yahweh had not yet granted. Elijah lay down on the widow's son three times, which may have been an attempt to remove uncleanness through atoning or purifying practices.³⁵ It may also symbolically represent a pulling of the boy out of the grave. Yahweh responded to Elijah's request and returned the boy's life. This is the first recorded resurrection in the Bible, and it was done for a foreigner and not an Israelite. For the first time the widow expressed an absolute certainty that it was Yahweh who was the true God.

In the Baal epic, Baal is captured and taken into the grave every fall by Mot, the god of death and the underworld. Each spring Baal is rescued by his wife Anath. This explained the seasons and showed Baal to be the god of life because he was able to come out of the grave. Now there had been a famine and Baal had not returned from the grave because Yahweh had defeated him. Yet

³⁴ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 234.

³⁵ See Nobuyoshi Kiuchi. "Elijah's Self-Offering: 1 Kings 17, 21," p. 78.

it was Yahweh who had brought the boy back from the grave in the midst of the famine in Baal territory.

18:1-6 After three years of no rain Yahweh commanded Elijah to return to Ahab, for Yahweh was going to bring the rain, and Elijah obeyed Yahweh. For the last three years Jezebel had set herself completely against Yahweh by killing the prophets of Yahweh in order to get Elijah. And while Elijah had been provided for by Yahweh, Ahab's authority had been marginalized with his search for water and green grass.

“In the ancient world royal responsibility for rain is not unlike contemporary presidential responsibility for the economy. The measure of an effective king is rain that produces crops. In this simple assertion the capacity to administer rain and therefore life is taken from the king. The king is made a political irrelevance, void of any critical function for society.”³⁶

Obadiah was Ahab's palace administrator who was helping Ahab find water for the devastated land. But Obadiah was loyal to Yahweh. He had been hiding a hundred prophets of Yahweh in caves and had been providing for them. His loyalty to Yahweh was so great that he was risking his own life by hiding the prophets of Yahweh. In contrast Ahab looks more pathetic than regal, for he cannot find Elijah and he cannot find grass.

18:7-16 Elijah came to Obadiah and told him to go to Ahab and let him know that Elijah had returned. Obadiah became incredibly afraid at this command, for if he revealed to Ahab that he was a servant of Yahweh then he would be killed like all the prophets of Yahweh had been. And the last time Elijah came into the land he disappeared for three years. Obadiah feared that would happen again and he would be on his own and exposed before Ahab. Elijah promised Obadiah that he would appear before Ahab as he had said he would, but he never said whether it would be safe for Obadiah or not. Obadiah demonstrated great faith in Yahweh by obeying. The point of this narrative is to reveal that many prophets had been willing to die for their faith in Yahweh, and that there were many people who were still incredibly faithful to Yahweh despite the risk to their lives. Elijah was not alone in his commitment to Yahweh and the risk to his life.

18:17-20 Ahab called Elijah a “troubler” (*oker*), which was a term used of Achan (Josh. 6:18; 7:25) and Saul (1 Sam. 14:29) who were covenant breakers. Ahab saw Elijah as a “troubler” because he was politically unfaithful to the throne of Israel. Yet, Elijah made it clear that it was Ahab who was the true “troubler” for he and his family had been unfaithful to Yahweh and His covenant by worshiping Baal and leading the nation into Baal worship. Ahab's dynasty had become the new Achans. Elijah commanded Ahab to summon the prophets of Baal and Asherah and the people of Israel to meet him at Mount Carmel.

Mount Carmel is a twenty-four-mile long mountain range that starts just south of the Jezreel Valley and extends in a northwestern direction, which then extends into the Mediterranean Sea. Its northern most peak is 1,791 feet high, which was at the Phoenician and Israelite border. The Phoenicians regarded Mount Carmel as one of Baal's sacred dwelling place, for storms with lightning and thunder were common on Mount Carmel. It also commemorated Baal's defeat of the sea god Yam, which allowed him to rule over all the other gods.³⁷ The name “Carmel” means

³⁶ Walter Brueggemann. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 209.

³⁷ See John A. Beck. “Geography as Irony: The Narrative-Geographical Shaping of Elijah's Duel with the Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18),” pp. 298-299

“the garden land,” and it was famous for its fertile soil. Yet it was on Baal’s sacred mountain that there was no green grass anymore and where Yahweh was about to defeat him.

18:21-24 Like Moses (Ex. 32:26; Josh. 24:14-24), Elijah urged the people to choose their god, for they were trying to serve two gods simultaneously. The Hebrew word for “waver” (*pacach*) is used elsewhere to describe Mephibosheth’s crippled legs (2 Sam. 4:4), and it is used to explain the ritual dance of Baal’s prophets (1 Kgs. 18:26). The Israelites were limping on two “crutches” (*seippm*) because they had tried to serve two completely different gods.³⁸ This choice is not necessary in polytheism, but it is necessary with Yahweh. In polytheism one serves all the gods to make sure all one’s bases are covered. Yet the people did not respond to Elijah, which shows their lack of commitment to either god. Elijah then declared that he was the only faithful worshiper of Yahweh left. The reader knows that this was not true because of the Obadiah narrative. Yet Elijah saw himself as alone as both a martyr in his isolation and with hubris that he alone had remained faithful.

Elijah commanded the prophets to get two bulls, one for themselves and one for him in order to prepare for a sacrifice to each of their gods. Yahweh and the gods both required healthy animals for sacrifices and since they were picking Elijah’s there is a good chance they picked a less than desirable sacrifice for him. They would then both call on their gods to send down fire from the sky and the god who responded would be considered the true god. Most likely this is not just fire but lightning. Lightning was known as the fire of the gods, given the fact that Baal was the god of the storm and rain. So, the question that would be answered in this contest was who truly controlled the storm and who could bring rain, life, and blessings to the people. The people agreed that this was a fair contest.

18:25-29 Elijah commanded the prophets of Baal to go first. They called on the name of Baal from morning till noon while they did ritual dances around the altar of Baal. The people of the ancient Near East believed that the more people devoted to a god made the god more powerful and more likely to respond. Surely Baal should have responded with 450 prophets chanting. From morning to noon would have had to been at least two to three hours of them chanting and nothing happening. Twice the narrator mentions Baal’s lack of response, emphasizing his powerlessness to do anything for the people.

Then Elijah stepped up and began to taunt them. He told them to shout louder because maybe Baal could not hear them because he was deep in meditation, turned aside, traveling, or sleeping. The phrase “turned aside” (*ciyg*) is euphemistic for being on the toilet, a meditative or intestinal preoccupation.³⁹

And just as he said, they began to shout louder. They began to cut themselves as a means of offering their own blood to Baal. The fact that Baal required self-mutilation shows that he was not truly the god of life but death. They also went into an ecstatic state, which is usually associated with some kind of prophesying (Num. 11:16-30; 1 Sam. 10:5-6, 10-11; 18:10-11; 19:18-24). They did this until evening, which means at least five more hours of shouting. This would have been mentally and emotionally draining for Elijah to be in the midst of this pagan ritual for so long. Three times the narrator states that there was no response from Baal.

³⁸ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 243.

³⁹ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 245.

18:30-40 Elijah then summoned the people to him and repaired the altar of Yahweh that Ahab had allowed to fall apart. Just like Moses at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:4), Elijah built an altar on Mount Carmel with twelve stones for the twelve tribes. It is interesting that the narrator mentions Jacob being renamed Israel, which means “God prevails”, for that was exactly what Yahweh was about to do. Elijah then dug a trench around the altar, which could hold seven quarts of liquid. He then placed the sacrificed animal on the altar. Then he had the people fill four jars of water and pour it on the altar three times. Elijah was rigging the contest against himself. Baal had more prophets, a better animal sacrifice, and Yahweh’s altar was drenched with water.

Elijah did not do a ritual, chant, or cut himself. He simply prayed to Yahweh. And like Moses, Elijah interceded on behalf of the people in the midst of their idolatry (Ex. 32:11-14). He called on Yahweh as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which is a phrase that refers to Yahweh as a covenantal and relational God of people, unlike Baal, who makes no covenants and is a god of nature. Elijah prayed that Yahweh would demonstrate His power as the One true God so that the people might turn back to Him in relationship with Him. Then fire fell from the sky and consumed the entire altar, sacrifice, stones and dirt. This was truly a supernatural event, for rocks do not burn and dirt is used to put fire out. The fire coming down on Mount Carmel was like the fire of Yahweh on Mount Sinai during the giving and renewing of the Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 19).

Elijah’s prayer was answered. The minute the people saw this they fell on the ground proclaiming Yahweh as God. Yahweh’s fire falling (*naphal*) caused Israel to fall (*naphal*) on the ground in worship. Like Moses (Ex. 34:2), Elijah renewed the covenant of Yahweh on the mountain. Like Moses (Ex. 24:5; 32:27; Josh. 24:14), Elijah commanded that all the prophets be “slaughtered” (*shachat*) in obedience to the Deuteronomic Law (Deut. 13). The word “slaughtered” (*shachat*) is most often used to describe sacrificial offerings (Ex. 24:5; Lev. 3:2; 4:24; 17:3; 22:28). The royal and cultic power of Ahab had been bested.

18:41-46 Elijah sent Ahab off to eat and drink, for the rain was about to come. Like Pharaoh, Ahab’s hard heart was revealed by the fact there was no response from him after the miraculous display of Yahweh’s power. Elijah went to the top of Mount Carmel and put his head between his knees both in exhaustion and in prayer for rain. Six times he sent his servant to look for rain and each time the servant reported that there was none. The seventh time the servant reported seeing a storm cloud that was so far away that it looked like the size of a man’s hand. The cloud was coming from the west. Elijah’s perseverance in prayer in the midst of no rain shows his trust that the word of Yahweh would be fulfilled as He had spoken it.

Elijah then told Ahab to get on his chariot (Deut. 17:16) and ride home, for the rain was coming. Jezreel was Ahab’s winter palace and was about 20 miles from Mount Carmel. Ahab would have to ride through the Jezreel Valley in order to get there. When the rains came, the Jezreel Valley turned into a swampy and muddy land that would ensnare Ahab’s chariot wheels. The power of Yahweh came upon Elijah and, tucking his robe into his belt to free his legs for running, he outran Ahab’s chariot all the way back to Jezreel. In the Bible the people of Israel were not allowed to have chariots and horses (Deut. 17:16; Prov. 20:7; Isa. 31:1), because it would cause them to trust in their military rather than in Yahweh. The prophets were seen as the “chariots and horses” of Yahweh as they spoke the word of Yahweh, stood against foreign armies, and sometimes ushered the coming of the heavenly army of Yahweh (2 Kgs. 2:11-12; 6:17; 7:6; 13:14). Elijah, as the “chariots and horses” of Yahweh (2 Kgs. 2:11-12), demonstrated the superiority of Yahweh as he outran the chariot and horses of Ahab. And just like Moses (Ex. 14:19, 26-28; 15:19), the chariots and horses of the new Pharaoh were defeated.

B. The Disobedience of Elijah (19:1-21)

After the amazing defeat of Baal at Mount Carmel, Elijah suddenly wanted to quit after Jezebel threatened to kill him. In the previous chapters there had been this pattern: Yahweh commanded Elijah and he obeyed, and Elijah commanded others and they obeyed. But in 1 Kgs. 19 the pattern is abandoned highlighting Elijah's disobedience.

19:1-6 When Jezebel heard what had happened, she threatened to kill Elijah in the name of her gods. The restored covenant was threatened when Ahab told Jezebel what had happened. The power of this threat coming from her and not Ahab shows who the real power in the kingdom was. Elijah was immediately filled with fear and ran for his life. Elijah left his servant behind and fled to Beersheba. Beersheba is in the southernmost part of Judah and is as far away from Jezebel one can get in the Promised Land. Nowhere did Yahweh command Elijah to go to Beersheba, therefore he was not where he was supposed to be. This is made evident when he clearly states that he no longer wanted to be a prophet, he had enough of serving Yahweh, and he wanted to die. Then, depressed and exhausted, he fell asleep. Just like Moses (Num. 11:15), Elijah wanted to die.

“The narrator’s psychological insight is powerful. If this were a literal request, that is, if Elijah truly wished to die, then he would have had no reason to flee from Jezebel! Elijah’s words reveal something much deeper about him: his sense of hopelessness, of disillusion and despair, of the futility of any further effort.”⁴⁰

After all the miraculous acts of Yahweh that he had seen, the fire at Mount Carmel, and the slaughter of the prophets of Baal, the threat of one woman undid him. After three years Elijah probably thought that the battle at Mount Carmel and the renewal of the covenant with the people there would bring an end to the conflict. Yet with the threat of Jezebel he realized that it was not over. He did not know how long it would take to destroy the power of Baal in the land. He was tired and ready to be done.

“Probably Elijah had played into Jezebel’s hand. Had she really wanted Elijah dead, she surely would have seized him without warning and slain him. What she desired was that Elijah and his God be discredited before the new converts who had aided Elijah by executing the prophets of Baal. Without a leader, revolutionary movements usually stumble and fall away. Just when God needed him the most, the divinely trained prophet was to prove a notable failure.”⁴¹

19:7-9a In Yahweh’s compassion he sent an angel to take care of Elijah’s needs by feeding him, providing a companion, and letting him rest. Just as Jezebel had sent messengers (*malak*) threatening death, now Yahweh sent a messenger (*malak*) providing life. The angel came again to feed Elijah, to strengthen him for the journey back to Israel and to Damascus (1 Kgs. 19:15), to finish the fight against the idolatry in the land and lead the people in the name of Yahweh. Instead he went further south to Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai, which is outside the Promised Land, and he went into a cave and slept. The word of Yahweh is absent until 1 Kgs. 19:9 (in contrast to 1 Kgs. 17:2, 8; 18:1), which makes it clear that Elijah’s journey to Mount

⁴⁰ Jerome T. Walsh. *1 Kings*, p. 267.

⁴¹ Richard D. Paterson and Hermann J. Austel. “1 Kings-Job,” p. 148.

Horeb was not commanded by Yahweh. Like Jonah (Jonah 1:1-3) he was attempting to write his own contract (Jonah 4).

19:9b-14 Yahweh made it clear that Elijah was not supposed to be in Horeb, for He asked why Elijah was there. Elijah ignored Yahweh's question and complained that he was the only faithful servant of Yahweh left, because all of the prophets of Yahweh had been killed and all the people of Israel had abandoned Yahweh. Yet this was not true for he knew that Obadiah had saved many prophets of Yahweh (1 Kgs. 18:4) and many hundreds of people had come back to Yahweh after the contest at Mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:39). In his depression he had ignored all the amazing things that Yahweh had done. And unlike Obadiah, Elijah was not able to persevere in his faith despite the seemingly overwhelming impossible nature of the trials ahead. Elijah would rather die than serve Yahweh anymore.

Elijah saw himself as the new Moses and like Moses (Ex. 33-34) he wanted to go into a cave on Mount Horeb and experience the glory of Yahweh. So, Yahweh commanded Elijah to go out and stand on the mountain and He would "pass by him," just as he had said to Moses (Ex. 33:19). If Elijah wanted a Moses experience on Mount Horeb then Yahweh was going to give it to him but on His terms, for He comes as He pleases. But Elijah remained in the cave. It was not uncommon for the prophets to fall into despair in the face of an idolatrous nation. But Yahweh did not allow these individuals to settle into their self-pity or perpetuate their desire for death and release. He met them where they were and engaged them at their point of discouragement.⁴²

Just like on Mount Sinai at the giving of the Law (Ex. 19:16; 20:18; Deut. 4:11; 5:24), Yahweh sent a whirlwind, earthquake, and fire. Yet unlike with Moses at Mount Sinai, Yahweh was not in any of those things. Elijah had already experienced these things on Mount Carmel, and it had not impacted him anymore than it had Ahab and Jezebel. However, Yahweh was in the calm voice that followed because He knew that was what Elijah needed. Then Elijah finally went out of the cave when he felt safe.

Moses "stands" before Yahweh (Ex. 33:21-22; 34:6), but Elijah, the prophet who claims that he "stands" (*'amad*) before Yahweh (1 Kgs. 17:1; 18:15), did not immediately comply. When he finally did "go out and stand" (*'amad*) his fear moved him only to the entrance of the cave. Now that Elijah had not gotten what he demanded, once again Yahweh asked the question why was he here? Elijah replied just as he did before, from his despair, sense of isolation, and selective memory.

19:15-18 Yahweh then commanded Elijah to go back the way that he had come and go to Damascus, which was in the territory of Aram. Yahweh commanded him to do three things; anoint Hazael as king over Aram as an external menace; Jehu as king over Israel as an internal usurper, and Elisha as the one who would replace him as prophet. Just like Moses with Joshua, Elijah was being provided a successor. Nowhere else is the prophetic mantle inherited by another. The violent language here alludes to the cleanings of the land of the idolatrous Canaanites (Deut. 7). Just like Joshua, Elisha would be responsible for a new military conquest of the land.

"Still, it should be noted that Elisha has the most challenging task of the three, as the ones he is supposed to kill are the most difficult and elusive targets, who would already have escaped from the kings Hazael and Jehu, and even more so when one considers the personalities of

⁴² See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 256.

these future kings. If we glance ahead in the story, Hazael is a fearsome leader who does not shrink from regicide, and proceeds to rip open pregnant women. For his part, Jehu is a maniacal chariot driver who deceptively lures Baal-worshippers to their deaths and turns the place into a latrine (after piling the heads of Ahab's descendants at the gate of Jezreel, that is). For Elisha to kill the escapees from *these two* would be quite a feat, to say the least. The immediate effect of this introduction—whereby Elisha is the third member of this daunting triumvirate—is that he is presented as a rather imposing figure even before the reader has officially met him, although that is poised to change in the next episode.”⁴³

Yahweh also made it very clear that there were thousands who were still faithful to Him. The ‘seven thousand’ points to the completeness of those who were loyal to Yahweh and is not necessarily a literal number of people. The battle with Baal would no longer be the fight of one prophet but would be joined by a large remnant and a successor prophet. Victory would come as the result of a political process not through a spectacular event. It would happen through the efforts of many and not just Elijah.

19:19-21 Elijah immediately went to Elisha and with no introduction or explanation of why he was there, he threw his cloak, the symbol of his prophetic office, on Elisha. The fact that Elisha had to run after Elijah meant that Elijah had not stopped and was walking on. Perhaps this was a test of Elisha’s ability to figure out what had happened and if he was committed. Elisha immediately figured out the implication and with great excitement asked permission to say goodbye to his family first before he left everything behind to be Elijah’s apprentice.

Elijah asked Elisha if he really understood what had happened to him, almost with a sense of “Do you really know what you are getting into?” Elisha slaughtered his animals and burned his plowing equipment communicating that he was completely sold out to the calling of Yahweh and willing to leave behind his affluent lifestyle. He then fed the people with the meat, which foreshadows his care and provision for the people of Israel. And then he followed Elijah.

Elisha’s name means “Yahweh is my salvation.” The fact that he had twelve oxen means that he came from a wealthy family. But the twelve oxen are also reminiscent of the twelve stones of Joshua (Josh 4) and the fact that Elisha would actually lead the people of Israel like Joshua, where Elijah never did.⁴⁴ Elijah’s origins were obscure, but Elisha’s were firmly rooted in the land with a family genealogy.

Yahweh had commanded Elijah to “go” (*halak*) and retrace his steps (*shuwb*). However, Elijah only “goes” (*halak*). Elijah completely disobeyed Yahweh and went straight to Elisha and did not anoint Hazael and Jehu as kings. For the rest of his life he never went to them to make them kings. He had told Yahweh that he was done and quit, and Yahweh had given him more to do. So, staying true to his word he disobeyed Yahweh and quit before doing the remaining tasks commanded of him. It is clear now that he was not the awaited prophet of Deut. 18:14-20 for he had failed to obey Yahweh. But just like Moses (Num. 20:6-12), he had disobeyed Yahweh. Every prophet who has ever disobeyed Yahweh has been killed as a judgment from Yahweh, including Moses. The question is, what would happen to Elijah? The reader will have to wait until 2 Kgs 2 for the answer.

⁴³ See Keith Bodner. *Elisha’s Profile in the Book of Kings*, p. 33.

⁴⁴ See Keith Bodner. *The Theology of the Book of Kings*, p. 118.

In contrast Elisha “follows” (*halak*) the prophet Elijah. Elijah responded to him by repeating Yahweh’s original command to “go” (*halak*) and “return” (*shuwb*). Elisha fills in the gap by “returning” (*shuwb*) (1 Kgs. 19:21). Similarly, his ministry would also echo and complete Elijah’s ministry.

C. The Disobedience of Ahab and Jezebel (20:1-21:29)

The narrator moves away from the Elijah narrative and focuses on the sin of Ahab and Jezebel in order to show the need for their judgment. Instead of Elijah and Elisha there are a number of other anonymous or minor prophets who came to Ahab in order to pronounce judgment.

20:1-12 Ben Hadad is most likely a dynastic throne name meaning “son of the god Hadad (Baal).” This Ben Hadad was different from the previous one with whom Asa had made a treaty in 1 Kgs. 15:18-19. Three Ben Hadads appear in the book of Kings. Ben Hadad I (1 Kgs. 15), Ben Hadad II (1 Kgs. 20; 22; 2 Kgs. 8), and Ben Hadad III (2 Kgs. 13).⁴⁵ Since the reign of Solomon, the Arameans had control over a significant portion of northern Israel (1 Kgs. 15:16-22) and were constantly pushing the borders into more of the land.

Ben Hadad II, with a vastly superior army including thirty-two kings, put Samaria, the capital of Israel, under siege. Ben Hadad II sent a message to Ahab demanding that he send him his silver, his gold, his best wives, and his children. Ahab agreed to the conditions. Ben Hadad II then sent a message saying that instead he was going to send his officials to go through Ahab’s palace to collect it all. To this Ahab refused, probably because he never intended to send all or the best of anything. Then Ben Hadad II swore in the name of his gods that he would level Samaria and leave nothing. Ahab responded with a caustic remark, saying basically “Do not act like you have already won when you have not even gotten ready for battle.” Ben Hadad II responded by attacking, which Ahab could not hope to withstand.

20:13-22 Yahweh then sent a prophet to Ahab to tell him that He would give him victory so that Ahab would know that Yahweh is the true God (Ex. 6:7; 7:5; 10:2; 14:4; 16:12). Despite Ahab’s disobedience, Yahweh was going to give him victory so that Israel would know that He was the true God, just as He had demonstrated at Mount Carmel. Ahab asked who would accomplish this victory, probably because he knew they could not win. Yahweh responded with “the servants of the district governors,” not the “junior officers” like some translations have. Any victory would be nearly impossible with local governors rather than trained soldiers. This would show Israel that Yahweh was the true power behind the victory. Still in doubt, Ahab asked who would lead or start the battle and Yahweh responded by saying Ahab would.

So, Ahab assembled the servants of the district governors and their men and went out to attack Ben Hadad II. Ahab’s men defeated the army of Ben Hadad II and Ben Hadad II escaped. The prophet then warned that Ben Hadad II would return the next spring. All of Ben Hadad II’s chariots and horses did not matter because the word of Yahweh had promised victory.

20:23-30 Ben Hadad II’s advisors concluded that they were defeated because the gods of Israel were the gods of the hills where they fought the battle. Israel had failed to testify to the nation about who Yahweh was. The nations thought Israel worshiped many limited gods. Ben Hadad II’s advisors recommended that he replace the commanders of the army, raise a new army, and next year fight Israel in the plains where they felt Israel’s gods had no power. The next spring the two armies faced each other in the plains. The prophet then told Ahab that Yahweh would defeat Ben Hadad II’s army in order to show Ben Hadad II that He was not limited to the hill country. Once again Ahab’s men were victorious against Ben Hadad II.

⁴⁵ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 263.

Ben Hadad II then surrendered to Ahab and offered to give all the cities that he had taken in previous battles back to Ahab if he let him live. Ahab agreed and let him go. However, Ahab's agreement with Ben Hadad II was contrary to Yahweh's Law, which called for the deaths of Israel's enemies (Deut. 20:10-15).

20:35-43 The phrase "company of the prophets" comes from the Hebrew phrase *ben nabi'*, which literally means "sons of the prophets." This is the first time this group is mentioned, and they sporadically appear between 1 Kgs. 20 and 2 Kgs. 9 and then are never mentioned again. In Hebrew whenever you have the phrase "sons of x," then the nature of the sons is whatever the "x" is. Like the TV show the "*Sons of Anarchy*," which is not saying that the men are the biological children of anarchy but that they are anarchist. Which means that they are not a group of prophet's kids but are a guild of prophets. They are never defined with any real clarity in the passages that mention them. Thus, the group is described by scholars in various ways, from hobos to crackpots. Many of their behaviors are strange and they seem to be connected to Yahweh or a legitimate prophet in one passage (2 Kgs. 9:1) and then coming out of the idolatrous city of Bethel in another passage (2 Kgs. 2:3). The vague nature of their existence adds to the ambiguous nature of the prophets not always being sure of where they stand with Yahweh.

One of the sons of the prophets commanded one of his companions to strike him with a sword, but the man refused. The prophet then declared that, because the companion had disobeyed Yahweh, he would die. Then a lion attacked the man and killed him. The lion as a figure of judgment against disobedience (1 Kgs. 13:24; 20:36) also connects this passage to 1 Kgs. 13, and in both the issue is disobedience to the prophetic word.

The prophet found another man and commanded him to strike him and the man obeyed. The prophet disguised himself. Then when Ahab came along, the prophet pretended to be a soldier who was charged with his life to guard an enemy captive, but the captive had escaped. He begged for mercy from Ahab for his life to be spared, but Ahab refused and said that he must die.

The prophet then revealed himself. He told Ahab that he had done the same thing and should have killed Ben Hadad II as Yahweh (Law) had commanded, therefore he was going to die. The command from Yahweh the prophet was referring to was most likely the laws concerning warfare with nations that attacked Israel (Deut. 20). Sullen and angry that he had been taken in by the ruse, Ahab did not respond in repentance. He returned to Samaria resentful and vexed, and this attitude would prevail in his response to Naboth.

The death of the man who disobeyed the prophet of Yahweh and the judgment of death upon Ahab makes it clear that Yahweh is the true sovereign king and His word will not be ignored. But it also reminds the reader that Yahweh had not dealt with Elijah's disobedience yet.

21:1-7 One day Ahab saw a vineyard that he thought he could have. He wanted to turn it into a vegetable garden. But it belonged to Naboth, so he offered to pay for it or give him a different one. The phrase "vegetable garden" (*legan-yaraq*) is negative phrase, for it is found only in Deut. 11:10 (*kegan hayyaraq*), describing Egypt, the land of Israel's slavery. In contrast Israel was a vine under Yahweh's special care (Isa. 3:14; 5:1-2; Jer. 10:10; Jn. 15:1-8). Both allusions negatively characterize Ahab's intent.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 274.

The offer to purchase the land is not inherently illegal for there were laws that regulated the sale of the land (Lev. 25:23-28; Deut. 25:5-10). But Naboth refused to sell the land because it was his inheritance from Yahweh. He, and all of Israel, possessed the land because of covenant promises made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:8), fulfilled in Israel's entry into the Promised Land (Josh. 1:2-4), and the division of the land to the different tribes under Joshua (Josh. 13-21). His conviction was rooted in the idea that Yahweh is the true owner of the land and His Law that protected the inheritance of land He gave His people.

Ahab went home sulking and threw himself on his bed. This response probably had a lot to do with the judgment of Yahweh in the previous chapter as well. Jezebel came in and asked him what was wrong, and he told her about Naboth's refusal. Ahab changed Naboth's refusal, significantly by failing to report the religious convictions upon which Naboth's refusal was based. This made Naboth appear arbitrary and rude. Jezebel then rebuked Ahab for not being more kingly and told him she would get the land. Ahab's passive pout may have been masterful manipulation to get her hands bloody instead of his.⁴⁷

21:8-16 Jezebel wrote letters to the elders of Naboth's city telling them to have a festival and to honor Naboth at the festival. Then they were to have two scoundrels falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy against God and king, then kill him. The legal charade included two witnesses as required by the law (Deut. 17:6; 19:15) but they were not men of integrity. Blasphemy against Yahweh was punishable by death, and blasphemy against the king was probably treated with the same penalty (Ex. 22:28; Lev. 24:16; 2 Sam. 16:5-9; Isa. 8:21). Just killing Naboth would not get her the land for it would just go to his children, thus she had to dishonor the family. Biblical evidence suggests that in the case of treason the deceased offender's land ceded to the throne instead of going to the children (2 Sam. 16:4; Ezra 10:8; Ezek. 45:8; 46:18).⁴⁸ So the elders did just as she commanded. Then she commanded Ahab to take the land. Jezebel had acted decisively against Yahweh and the people, for she had committed murder and taken the land and the blessings of Yahweh from Naboth and his descendants.

21:17-28 Yahweh then came to Elijah and told him to pronounce judgment on Ahab for his violation of Yahweh's commands (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17). Ahab was to be killed and the dogs would lick his blood. Elijah then told Ahab that Yahweh was going to exterminate every male in the house of Ahab just as He had done with Jeroboam and Baasha. Ahab's hands were just as bloody as Jezebel's, for he had taken what she had wrongfully seized. In addition, Jezebel would also be killed, left unburied, and consumed by dogs.

"The story of Naboth warns against the use of piety and legality to cloak injustice. It teaches that those who support the plots of a Jezebel, whether by silent acquiescence or overt complicity, share her crime. It is a resounding affirmation that injustice touches God, that 'as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Matt. 25:40, 45), that in the cosmic order of things there is a power at work that makes for justice. And the story attests that there is awesome power in the conscience and protest of the individual servant of God."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 274.

⁴⁸ See Nahum M. Sarna. "Naboth's Vineyard Revisited (1 Kings 21)," pp. 122-125.

⁴⁹ Genes Rice. *Nations Under God*, p. 181.

Ahab responded with the wearing of sackcloth and fasting, which was more than he had done previously. Because Ahab humbled himself, Yahweh sent Elijah to tell him that he would be spared from seeing the destruction of his house in his lifetime. After all that Ahab had done and not even demonstrating true repentance, it is amazing the mercy that Yahweh showed Ahab.

D. The Demise of Ahab (22:1-51)

This section fulfills the prophetic judgment against Ahab (1 Kgs. 20:42; 21:18-19), although full execution was left until 2 Kgs. 9-10 with Jehu. Here the narrator emphasizes Ahab's total disregard for Yahweh's word and therefore the justification of his death.

22:1-8 For three years Israel was free of war with Aram in the north. Jehoshaphat was the king of Judah after the death of Asa. His reign would not be formally introduced until 1 Kgs. 22:41-50, where he is described as a godly king. He had formed a marriage alliance between his son, Jehoram, and Ahab's daughter, Athaliah (2 Kgs. 8:18; 2 Chr. 18:1) and thus had secured peace between Israel and Judah that would last for thirty-three years (874-841 BC).

One day while in the palace of Ahab, Ahab said to Jehoshaphat that the Arameans had taken Ramoth Gilead, which was located in the northern part of Transjordan. Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to join him in taking the land back. Jehoshaphat may have had to agree to this due to the stipulations of their alliance. Jehoshaphat's support of Ahab in the face of the coming prophetic warnings of death (2 Kgs. 22:23) and his entry into battle as a decoy (1 Kgs. 22:30) indicate he was the weaker king in the alliance.⁵⁰ However, he did ask that they seek permission from Yahweh first.

So, Ahab brought his four hundred prophets and asked them if he should go to war. The prophets responded with a unanimous yes and that Yahweh would give him victory. The narrator does not state what kind of prophets these are for they spoke as if they represented Yahweh. However, their numbering at four hundred reminds the reader of the prophets at Mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:19) and even Jehoshaphat was suspicious of them when he asked for a true prophet of Yahweh. Ahab responded that there was the prophet Micaiah, but that Ahab hated him because Micaiah never said anything good about him.

22:9-16 The fact that Ahab was able to bring Micaiah into the palace so quickly may imply that he was in prison. Zedekiah, one of the prophets of Ahab, even did a demonstration with ram horns of how Ahab would gorge the Aramean army to death. The messengers told Micaiah that all the prophets were prophesying in favor of Ahab and told him that he was to agree. Micaiah made it clear that he could only speak what Yahweh had told him to speak.

Micaiah told Ahab that he should go ahead and attack Aram for Yahweh would give him victory. This is not at all what is expected after all the pandering of the prophets and the emphasis on what is a true prophet of Yahweh. Even Ahab was suspicious of this answer, for Micaiah usually did not say anything good about him. Ahab demanded the truth.

22:17-23 At that Micaiah then said Israel was without a shepherd, a true king of Yahweh, and therefore Israel was not following Yahweh and was scattered and lost. This contradicts what he had previously said. Micaiah then described a vision that he had of Yahweh and His divine council.⁵¹ Yahweh asked His council who had an idea for convincing Ahab that he should go into battle so that he may die. Many spirits in the council had ideas but Yahweh rejected them all. Finally, a spirit said that he would deceive the prophets of Ahab into thinking he would have victory in battle so that he would go and die. Yahweh then commanded the spirit to go and do so and that he would succeed. Micaiah then declared that Yahweh had deceived Ahab's prophets so

⁵⁰ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 283.

⁵¹ See Cory Baugher. *The Divine Council of Yahweh*, at www.knowingthebible.net.

that Ahab would be deceived into thinking he would be victorious in battle. This makes it clear that Yahweh can use whomever he chooses, even false prophets, to accomplish His will.

What is shocking to many readers is that Yahweh deceived Ahab by putting a lying spirit in the mouths of the prophets. Yahweh approved, commanded, and took credit for the deception. However, the Bible makes it clear that Yahweh is a righteous God who does not lie (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Heb. 6:18) and affirms His truthfulness (Ps. 31:5; Tit. 1:2). Yet there are many passages, other than this one, that reveal that Yahweh uses deception to accomplish His will (Isa. 19:13-14; Jer. 4:10; Ezek. 14:19; 2 Thess. 2:11-12; Ps. 18:25). How does one reconcile the apparent contradictions between these passages?

If one reads carefully the passages that affirm Yahweh's truthfulness, then one will find that they are all about His covenant promises. Yahweh makes it very clear in these passages that when He makes promises and covenants with people, He always honors His word and does not go back on it or change his mind like humans do. He always keeps His word and promises, no matter what.

The passages concerning His deception all involve very evil leaders or false prophets. They are people who have deceived, oppressed, and destroyed people. Yahweh is treating them exactly the way that they had treated others. He is giving them over into their own lies and destruction as their judgment (Rom. 1:18-32). Yahweh acts towards people according to their own propensity, and those who oppose Him, He opposes. The deception plays out to their judgment, and their sin is called to account.

Yahweh is truthful and keeps His promises and oaths, but He does use deceit to bring judgment on others and He does it without compromising His trustworthy character. Unlike humans who deceive in order to selfishly get what they want without regard to others and cannot see the long-term ramifications of their actions, Yahweh uses deceit to bring an end to selfish people, not to get what He selfishly wants. He sees all the way into eternity and knows the ramifications of His actions. He is trustworthy to those who love Him and to those who are faithful to His covenant. But those who reject the covenant laws of loving Him and others, and who shake their fists in rebellion can only expect judgment.

“While this use of deception may seem contrary to God's truthful character, it is actually consistent with His justice. Psalm 18:25-26 states the general principle that the Lord always responds appropriately to people. Each individual receives from the Lord exactly what he deserves and God's actions mirror those of the individual. God reveals Himself as faithful, blameless, and pure to those who are characterized by these qualities (vv. 25-26a), but wicked and deceptive rebels find that He is a resolute and dangerous foe who frustrates their efforts (v. 26b) and even utilizes deceit to bring them down. As Alexander, commenting on Psalm 18:26, states, ‘the same course of proceeding which would be perverse in itself or towards a righteous person, when pursued towards a sinner becomes a mere act of vindictory justice.’”⁵²

22:24-28 Zedekiah then slapped Micaiah, for Zedekiah's honor and credibility had just been attacked. His question is ironic because his implication is that the spirit of Yahweh was in him and when it left it did not go to Micaiah because Micaiah's prophecy disagreed with his. The irony is that Micaiah was right, for Zedekiah did indeed have a lying spirit. Micaiah did not agree because Micaiah was speaking the truth. Micaiah responded that Zedekiah would find out

⁵² Robert B. Chisholm. “Does God Deceive?” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, p. 28.

he was wrong on the day Ahab died, and that on that day he would be hiding from the death that the king's son would bring on him for being wrong. Micaiah was then thrown in prison.

22:29-40 Ahab decided that he would deceive Yahweh by disguising himself when he went into battle. Jehoshaphat was to wear the royal robes so the enemy would think he was Ahab. Ahab would disguise himself to deceive the prophet just as the prophet had disguised himself to deceive Ahab (1 Kgs. 20:35-43). The disguises that kings use are always ineffectual and always result in an oracle of doom against the king (1 Sam. 28:8; 1 Kgs. 14:2; 20:38).

Ben Hadad II ordered his commanders to only attack Ahab. When they rode up to Jehoshaphat and discovered that he was not Ahab they withdrew. This shows the provision of Yahweh over Jehoshaphat's life, for why would Ben Hadad II give such a command? Why would they not also be interested in the king of Judah? Yet someone drew their bow at random and the arrow just happened to hit Ahab right between the seams of his armor. This was the providence of Yahweh directing the arrow. Ahab eventually bled out to death, his body was returned to Samaria, and he was buried.

While they washed the chariot of Ahab's blood, the dogs licked it up just as Yahweh had said. And they washed the chariot at the pool where the prostitutes bathed. These were more likely temple prostitutes, which were forbidden by Yahweh (Deut. 23:17-18). Just like they had prostituted themselves to others, so Ahab had prostituted himself to Baal and now dogs were consuming his blood. There is also an irony in that his chariot, which is a symbol of his military might, had failed him and was covered in blood (Deut. 17:16). There are parallels in Ahab's life to that of Saul. Both were troublemakers of Israel, rejected by Yahweh because they would not kill the enemy, troubled by a spirit from Yahweh, resorted to disguise that led to their judgment, and killed on the battlefield by the enemy. When Ahab died, he was succeeded by his son Ahaziah (1 Kgs. 22:51–2 Kgs. 1:18).

Ahab was brought down through deception because he had brought others down through deception (1 Kgs. 21). Also, he had disregarded how his sin affected others and had disregarded the rebuke of Yahweh's prophets. This showed that all he cared about was his will. He stood in total opposition and rebellion to Yahweh and His righteous Law. In fact, when Micaiah revealed the truth to Ahab, rather than evaluating his actions in light of Yahweh's revelation, he insisted on charging into battle regardless of Yahweh's word. He was going to do what he wanted and outsmart Yahweh. This was a dangerous man who would only harm others.

22:41-50 The narrator now shifts to the king of Judah. Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, reigned over Judah for twenty-five years during the reign of Ahab, the king of Israel. He did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh as his father had before him. However, he too did not tear down the high places. As mentioned earlier, Jehoshaphat secured peace between Israel and Judah that would last for thirty-three years. He too continued to remove the male shrine prostitutes in the land. Jehoshaphat had built a fleet of ships to collect gold that were destroyed, probably by Yahweh since it was a violation of the Deuteronomic regulations for the king (Deut. 17:17). When he died, he was succeeded by his son Jehoram (2 Kgs. 8:16-24).

E. Elijah Confronts Ahaziah (1 Kgs. 22:51–2 Kgs. 1:18)

Just like his father, Ahaziah continued the worship of Baal in the land. And once again Elijah came back into the picture in order to confront him and his god.

22:51-53 The narrator now shifts to the kings of Israel. Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, reigned over Israel for two years during the reign of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Ahab, Jezebel, and Jeroboam. He continued the worship of Baal in the land.

1:1-2 The rebellion of Moab against Israel after the death of Ahab is later significant in the narrative but the narrator segues to Ahaziah's sickness and Elijah being taken away. The virtually identical opening at 2 Kgs. 3:5 resumes the rebellion. This repetitive frame (2 Kgs. 1:2; 3:5) is used to signal simultaneous events.⁵³

Ahaziah had fallen out of his palace window and was injured badly enough that he did not know if he would survive. So, he sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub on whether he would survive or not. Not only did the king send his messengers to Baal but he sent them outside the land of Israel to Philistine territory, rather than seeking Yahweh.

In the Ugaritic Baal Epic and other places, Baal was sometimes referred to as *Baal-Zebul*, which means "Lord Prince" (KTU 1.6i41-42). However, the prophets and the narrator called him *Baal-Zebub* literally means "lord of the flies." The word *zebub* is used for "flies" in Isa. 7:18; Eccl. 10:1.⁵⁴ There also is a connection to dung, which flies gather around. Thus, Baal is called "Lord Dung." This would explain Elijah's taunt of Baal being on the toilet (1 Kgs. 18:27).

1:3-8 Yahweh generally addressed Elijah directly, but here, as in 1 Kgs. 19:7, an angel commissioned him. The angel told Elijah to intercept Ahaziah's messengers and ask them why Ahaziah consulted Baal-Zebub when he could consult Yahweh. Elijah sent them back with the message that, because he went to Baal-Zebub instead of Yahweh, he would die from his injuries.

The messengers returned so quickly that Ahaziah asked them why they were back. They told him that a man had sent them back with this message. The authority of Elijah must have been especially compelling, because they only knew him as "a man" who met them. When they described him as hairy, Ahaziah immediately knew him as Elijah.

1:9-12 Ahaziah then flexed his authority by sending a captain with fifty men to forcibly bring Elijah to him. Elijah had overcome all of Yahweh's foes, human and divine, and unfortunately, Ahaziah had forgotten this aspect of Elijah's identity. Elijah sitting on top of the hill is reminiscent of Mount Carmel and places Elijah above the captain, showing that he is closer to Yahweh and therefore is the greater authority and power. The hill top emphasizes that, while Ahaziah had gone up and would not come down from his bed of sickness by Yahweh's word, Elijah had gone up and would not come down except by Yahweh's word.⁵⁵

The captain demanded that Elijah come down in the name of the king. Elijah responded to the captain, "You just called me a man of God. Do you really know what that means? For if I truly am who you say I am then fire will come down on you as judgment for arrogantly demanding

⁵³ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 294.

⁵⁴ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 295.

⁵⁵ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 296.

that Yahweh obey your commands.” The fire came down and consumed the soldiers in judgment reminiscent of (1 Kgs. 18:38) the slaughter of the prophets of Baal for opposing Yahweh at Mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:40). Ahaziah responded arrogantly by sending another captain with fifty men, which produced the same result. Then stubbornly he sent a third captain and fifty men.

1:13-18 The third captain humbled himself before Elijah and cried out for mercy. His king had demanded he come back with Elijah or his life would be forfeit, but at the same time he had developed a respect for the authority and power of Yahweh over his life. In response to the captain’s humility the angel commanded Elijah to go with the captain. The angel assured him that he would be safe.

Elijah then gave Ahaziah the same message as he had previously given Ahaziah’s messengers. All of that and Ahaziah had no more than what he had earlier. In his pride he thought he could manipulate Elijah into changing Yahweh’s mind, but it had only brought more death. Ahaziah died just as Yahweh had spoken. Because Ahaziah had no son, his brother Jehoram (also called “Joram” in 2 Kgs. 8:25, 28-29; 9:14, 16) became king (2 Kgs. 3:1-27; 6-7; 9). In this culture, it was extremely significant and devastating to die without an heir to continue one’s line.

F. Elijah Is Taken Away (2 Kings 2:1-25)

The narrator pauses the narrative of kings between the reign of Ahaziah (2 Kgs. 1:17-18) and Joram (2 Kgs. 3:1-3) in order to highlight the passing of the prophetic office from Elijah to Elisha. This is the first time that Elijah and Elisha have been seen together since Elisha's commissioning (1 Kgs. 19:19-21).

There is a chiasmic structure in 2 Kgs 1-2 that emphasizes Elijah being taken away. But the parallels between Elijah and Elisha show that Elisha had truly inherited the prophetic authority of Elijah and thus had the right to continue his prophetic ministry.

A Elijah demonstrates his authority by bringing fire down on soldiers (1:1-15)

B Elijah judges a king by refusing healing (1:16-18)

C Elijah moves eastward out of the land (2:1-7)

D Elijah parts the Jordan River with the cloak and crosses over (2:8)

X Elijah is taken away in judgment (2:9-12)

D' Elisha parts the Jordan River with the cloak and crosses over (2:13-14)

C' Elisha moves westward into the land (2:15-18)

B' Elisha shows grace to the people through healing the waters (2:19-22)

A' Elisha demonstrates his authority by sending bears against the youths (2:23-25)

It is also here that the narrator answers the question of what would happen to Elijah after his disobeying Yahweh's direct commands. At three different times Elijah had asked Yahweh to take his life and now Yahweh was going to do that very thing in a very dramatic way.

2:1-6 The narrator immediately announces that this was the day that Yahweh was going to take Elijah into the sky in a whirlwind. The Hebrew word *shamayim* can mean "heaven" or "sky" depending on the context. There is an assumption by many people that Elijah was taken into heaven, but nothing in the context makes this clear. In fact, the context of the entire First Testament points more to the fact that the word should be understood as sky, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Elijah started his journey in Gilgal and moved eastward to the Jordan River and then out of the Promised Land. The cities of Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho were the first key cities of Joshua's conquest of the land. The fact that Elijah traveled to them in the reverse order of Joshua's conquest shows that, just like Moses, Joshua had failed to take the land for Yahweh and now it was up to Elisha, the second Joshua, to finish the conquest.

On their way to Gilgal Elijah told Elisha to stay, for Yahweh had called Elijah to Bethel. But Elisha refused to leave him. Elijah and Elisha made their way to Bethel and then Jericho. Each time Elijah tried to send Elisha away. Why did Elijah repeatedly try to leave Elisha behind when Yahweh told him to make Elisha his successor (1 Kgs. 19:15-18)? Maybe this was another test of Elisha's commitment as in 1 Kgs. 19:19-20. Perhaps Elijah feared for Elisha's life when the whirlwind would come to take Elijah. Perhaps he thought he should be taken away alone just as Moses had (Num. 20:6-12; Deut. 31:1-6; 34:1-8). Yet Elisha refused to be left behind. It is not Elijah's leadership that is seen but Elisha's persistent commitment to Yahweh's calling. The narrator's focus here is on the question of whether Elisha would take up the prophetic role.

At the same time Elisha was refusing to stay behind, the sons of the prophets came out of Bethel. They asked Elisha if he knew Yahweh was going to take Elijah away. Elisha said that he did. The first time the sons of the prophets appeared, one of them spoke on behalf of Yahweh (1 Kgs. 20:35-43), yet here it is difficult to figure out who they were connected to and what their motive was. These prophets came from Bethel where the golden calf of Jeroboam had been established (1 Kgs. 12:28-30), so it does not seem like they were devoted to Yahweh. The narrator states that there were fifty of the prophets, which is reminiscent of the captains and their fifty men that opposed Elijah (2 Kgs. 1:9-12). Yet they all knew that Elijah was going to be taken away. They too persisted in their questioning of Elisha, which seems more of an annoyance than a commitment like it was with Elisha's persistence. Elisha kept responding by telling them to be quiet. The verb *chashah* can also mean "be still" or "be inactive," which means Elisha was asking them not to get involved. Leadership is the dominant issue here with the sons of the prophets. They never addressed Elijah, but only spoke to Elisha as if he were some kind of intermediary. Are they curious, sad, or mocking?

2:7-8 They soon made it to the Jordan River where Elijah rolled up his cloak and struck the river so that it parted, and Elijah and Elisha crossed over leaving the sons of the prophets behind. The prophet's cloak was the symbol of his authority as God's spokesman (1 Kgs. 19:19). Just as Moses had parted the Red Sea with his rod (Ex. 14:21-22), so Elijah parted the Jordan River with his rolled up, rod-like cloak. Elijah had moved eastward, which is a symbol of judgment (Gen. 3:24; 4:16; 11:2; 13:11; 28), and out of the land, which is perceived to be outside the covenant promises of Yahweh.

2:9-10 Elijah asked if there was anything he could do for Elisha before he was taken away. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. The double portion refers to the customs of the son's inheritance of the father's land upon his death (Deut. 21:17). Elisha was asking to succeed Elijah as prophet as if he were his son. But inheritances were only given at the death of the father. Elijah said that what Elisha had asked was a difficult thing for him to grant, but if Elisha saw him taken away that showed that Yahweh had granted his request. The difficulty of Elisha's request is twofold. First, the prophetic ministry is only by Yahweh's appointment, not by heredity or designation. The closest parallel is the prophet Moses (Deut. 18:18; 34:10) who designated his successor Joshua, but only by Yahweh's direction. Second, a prophet should be able to see into the realm of Yahweh, which is the difficult test that Elijah had set before Elisha.

2:11 As Elijah and Elisha were walking along, a chariot and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah was taken into the sky in a whirlwind. Whenever the whirlwind or storm is mentioned it always refers to the appearance of Yahweh in judgment or His using of a foreign military against another nation in judgment (Job 30:21-23; 36:27-33; 38:1-3; 40:6; Ps. 11:6; 50:3-4; Prov. 1:24-27; 10:24-25; Isa. 40:23-24; Jer. 22:22; 23:19; 30:23; Ezek. 1:4; 10; 30:3; Jonah 1:4; Nahum 1:3; Zech. 7:14; Heb. 12:18). The chariots and horses of Yahweh with the whirlwind also communicates judgment (Isa. 66:15; Jer. 4:13).

Elijah was NOT taken away in the chariot but in the whirlwind. Yahweh is the only one who rides the chariot of the storm (Ps. 68:17; 104:3; Ezek. 1:4-28; 10). This is why when Jesus said he would come back riding on the clouds, referring to his coming in judgment (Dan. 7:9-14), Caiaphas accused him of blasphemy (Matt. 26:62-65; Rev. 1:7). For Elijah to be taken up in the whirlwind of Yahweh would have been to be swept up in His judgment. Nothing would survive that. Elijah was taken in the whirlwind for his disobedience just like Yahweh had killed every prophet who disobeyed him. Elijah had asked Yahweh to take him (1 Kgs. 19:4) and Yahweh

had responded in a very spectacular way. There is an allusion to Obadiah's statement that "the spirit of Yahweh will carry you off, I know not where." (1 Kgs 18:12). Elijah had truly become just like Moses both in his disobedience to Yahweh and dying outside the Promised Land (Num. 20:6-12; Deut. 31:1-6; 34:1-8). What happened to Elijah's body is not known, just like what happened to Moses's body is not known (Deut. 34:5-6). He had failed to be the awaited prophet (Deut. 18:14-20) for the only one who could fulfill this role and surpass it would be Jesus the Messiah. There is a chance that he did not die since the text does not specifically say that he died. Perhaps he was simply removed from the Promised Land, never to be seen again.

The other reason that Elijah was not taken into heaven is because no one gets into heaven without the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus is the only way into heaven (John 14:6; Acts 4:11-12). Jesus had not atoned for sin when Elijah was taken away. To say that Elijah got into heaven without the sacrificial atonement of Jesus is completely contrary to the core of the gospel.

2:12-18 Elisha saw what happened and immediately recognized it as the chariot and horses of Yahweh. The title "the chariots and horsemen of Israel" is later used again of Elisha in 2 Kgs. 13:14 and its two uses bookend Elisha's career. The prophet was seen as "the chariots and horses of Israel" for as the representative of Yahweh, Israel would need no other chariots and horses (Deut. 17:16). The title is used to emphasize the prophet's spiritual warfare rather than the military battles of men. It was a reminder that the military power of Israel—a group of former slaves recently departed from Egypt—does not primarily reside in the superior military, weaponry, or strategy. Rather military victory comes through the power of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Elisha would later deal with soldiers, armies, and wars (2 Kgs. 3; 5; 6:8-7:20; 13:1-25) with only the word of Yahweh.

Elisha then mourned the loss of Elijah and tore his cloths. The tearing of clothes is a mourning ritual that is only done when someone has died (Gen. 37:34; 2 Sam. 13:31). Elisha believed that Elijah was dead. Elisha picked up the cloak of Elijah and struck the water with it. Yet it was not until he invoked the name of Yahweh that the waters parted. He had received the mantle of prophet not because he had Elijah's cloak but because Yahweh had given it to him.

Like Joshua was the successor of Moses (Num. 27:12-23; Deut. 31-34) so now Elisha was the successor of Elijah. Joshua had seen the celestial warrior (Josh. 5:13-15) and Elisha had seen the celestial chariot and horses of Yahweh. Just like Joshua, Elisha crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land (Josh. 3). Elisha would then travel the same cities in the same order as Joshua in the new conquest of the land.

When the sons of the prophets saw Elisha parting the Jordan River, they knew he had the authority of Elijah as prophet and they submitted to his authority. They then asked if they could go look for the body of Elijah, perhaps to bury it. Elisha told them not to, but they did anyway, and they found no body. Once again, the fifty were unsuccessful (2 Kgs. 1:9-12).

2:19-22 When Elisha came to Jericho, retracing the steps of Elijah, the people came to Elisha and told him that the water had been contaminated and the land was not producing crops. The people had immediately recognized his authority, just like Moses' authority had been recognized (Ex. 15:23-25). Elisha had them bring him a bowl of salt and he threw the salt into the well. This is an allusion to Moses throwing a stick into the bitter waters (Ex. 15:22-25). Elisha said that he had healed the water, but salt does not purify water and one does not use the word heal in relation to water. The use of the salt was a purificatory symbol of healing in ritual offerings to

Yahweh (Lev. 2:13). Joshua had previously put a curse on the people and city of Jericho if anybody rebuilt it (Josh. 6:26) and Hiel reaped the curse when he rebuilt it under the sponsorship of Ahab (1 Kgs. 16:34). Yahweh graciously removed the curse from the city and healed the land so that it would be fertile once again. In Elisha's conquest he is slightly different than Joshua because he will also bring healing. Unlike Ahaziah, who sought out Baal and died, the people of the city could now have a productive land and healthy children because they sought Yahweh through Elisha.

2:23-25 On Elijah's way north he passed by Bethel, but never entered so that he would not be connected to the idol worship there (1 Kgs. 12:28-30). From Bethel a large group of young men came out and began to mock him and his baldness. His baldness is held up derisively in contrast to Elijah's hairiness (2 Kgs. 1:8). He is not Elijah and they mock his prophetic ability.

The Hebrew phrase *ne'ārîm qetannîm* is translated as "youths" or "boys" in most translations. Most likely, these "boys" are grown men. This Hebrew phrase is used of Solomon who was old enough to be married (1 Kgs. 3:7). Rehoboam's friends who advised him are called *yeladin*, which means "children" (1 Kgs. 12:18) even though Rehoboam was forty-two at the time (1 Kgs. 14:21) and they were his friends who had grown up with him. These "boys" were at least old enough to be out on their own outside the city in a large group of over forty of them. So, it seems that calling them "boys" has more to do with their juvenile behavior rather their actual age.⁵⁶ The contrast is between the men of Jericho who treated him with respect and the men of Bethel who act like frat boys. They were mocking Yahweh's prophet and so were mocking Yahweh Himself. They were also idolaters from the city of Bethel.

Elijah called down a curse on the youths and two female bears came out of the woods and killed the forty-two "boys." The bears attacking them alludes to the lion that attacked the man of God from Judah (1 Kgs. 13:24) when there was a conflict over respect for the prophetic word of Yahweh. There is only death for the people of Yahweh who chose to rebel against the covenant and shake their fist at Him. The number forty-two appears again when it points to the end of Ahab's line (2 Kgs. 10:4).

⁵⁶ See Keith Bodner. *The Theology of the Book of Kings*, p. 134.

IV. The Ministry of Elisha (3:1-8:28)

Elijah was more of a recluse who came from the wilderness and never really interacted with and led the people of Israel. Likewise, his ministry was more of judgments against the monarchy and the gods. In some ways Elisha continued the ministry of Elijah and completed the commission given to Elijah at Horeb (1 Kgs. 19:15-16; 2 Kgs. 8:7-15; 9:1-3) but his ministry was also drastically different. Elisha was a prophet of the people who interacted with them, healed them, and led them, though he did have prophecies of judgments as well. Elisha's ministry also extended more to the foreigners, showing that Yahweh wanted to include them in His covenant as well. And in almost every case the foreigners responded with a greater faith in Yahweh than the people of Israel ever did. Having received a double portion of the Spirit of Yahweh (2 Kgs. 2:9-10) Elisha literally doubled the number of miracles that Elijah had done.

A. Israel Defeats Moab (3:1-27)

Jehoram's introductory summary returns the narrative to ordinary time after the interlude of Elisha's succession. Though Ahab and one of his sons, Ahaziah, were dead, Yahweh's judgment against the house of Ahab was still in force (1 Kgs. 21:17-24). Yet despite this judgment on the house of Ahab, Yahweh still showed grace and delivered Israel from Moab's army so that they would know that He was the true God and turn back to Him (1 Kgs. 18:36-37).

3:1-3 Jehoram, the son of Ahab, reigned over Israel for twelve years during the reign of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. Jehoram is also called "Joram" in 2 Kgs. 8:25, 28-29; 9:14, 16. Jehoram of Judah, the son of Jehoshaphat (2 Kgs. 1:17), was a contemporary of Jehoram of Israel, and is also called "Joram" in 2 Kgs. 8:21, 23-24; 11:2. The context makes it clear which king is in view, making the NIV's arbitrary decision to call the northern king Joram and the southern king Jehoram unnecessary.⁵⁷

Jehoram was the brother of the previous king Ahaziah and took the throne because Ahaziah had no son to succeed him (1 Kgs. 22:51–2 Kgs. 1:18). Jehoram did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, but he was not as bad as his parents, Ahab and Jezebel. He removed the sacred stone of Baal from the temple, but he did not tear down the temple. Jehoram is presented as tolerating the Baal worship even though he did not participate in it. But he did commit the sins of Jeroboam and worshiped the golden calves.

3:4-8 The kingdom of Moab was originally subjugated under David (2 Sam. 8:2) and interrelations continued in Solomon's era (1 Kgs. 11:7). With the division of the kingdom control passed to Israel. The vast numbers of Moab's tribute are hyperbolic (as in 2 Kgs. 4:21-24) and indicate Moab's utter subjugation. Now that Ahab was dead, Mesha the king of Moab decided to rebel and throw off the yoke of Israel. Jehoram asked Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in regaining control of Moab. Jehoshaphat joined him because he saw their two kingdoms as one nation. There were also joined by the king of Edom.

3:9-12 After seven days of marching in the desert of Edom the armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom had no water. Jehoram blamed Yahweh for giving them into the hands of Moab even though they had set out on a military venture without prophetic advice. It seems that Jehoram's military venture was poorly planned. It was Jehoshaphat who said that they should consult a prophet of

⁵⁷ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 312.

Yahweh. It was not Jehoram who mentioned Elisha but one of his officers. The mention of Elisha pouring water on the hands of Elijah may refer to him being Elijah's apprentice. Jehoshaphat recognized and approved of Elisha as being a prophet of Yahweh. The fact that the three kings went to see Elisha suggests that Elisha was nearby because it seems unlikely that an army without water would go in search of Elisha.

3:13-19 Elisha sarcastically asked why Jehoram was bothering him as a prophet of Yahweh when he should be going to the gods that he worshiped for help. After just blaming Yahweh for bringing them to their deaths, Jehoram now professed the providence of Yahweh as leading them. His affirmation "as Yahweh of hosts lives, before whom I stand" directly repeats Elijah's words in 1 Kgs. 18:15. Elisha then made it clear that the only reason he was going to help them was because Jehoshaphat, who was a godly king, was with them.

Elisha requested a harpist so that music would help him get in tune with the word of Yahweh. Elisha then prophesied that Yahweh, without the aid of rain, was going to fill this valley with water, for this was an easy thing for Yahweh to do. He then stated that Yahweh would deliver Moab into their hands and they would defeat Moab's fortified cities, cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs, and ruin every good field with stones. This ruining of the land when putting cities under siege is forbidden in Deut. 20:19 yet Yahweh made an exception on this occasion.

3:20-25 The next day water flowed from Edom and filled the valley with water just as the word of Yahweh had declared. When the Moabites went to fight the Israelites, they saw water and assumed that it was blood in the valley. They most likely did not know it was the sun on the water because they never saw water in the desert so they did not recognize the reflection of the sun. They assumed that the three kings had turned on each other and killed each other, which was very possible, and they sent for the plunder with their guard down. Israel then rose up against Moab and defeated the army and their cities just as the word of Yahweh had said.

3:26-27 Mesha, the Moabite king, took seven hundred of his best soldiers and fought against Israel, but they failed. Then in desperation Mesha sacrificed his first-born son to his god Chemosh, who then responded with a divine wrath against Israel. Israel, filled with fear from the divine attack against them, withdrew and returned home. The narrator does not state what god the divine wrath is associated with. The divine wrath could not have come from Yahweh, for why would He attack Israel when He had just promised them victory? Plus, there was no sin of Israel mentioned in their battle for which He would have punished them. There is nothing in the context of the narrative that even hints at Yahweh being in favor of Moab. Likewise, Yahweh has made His distaste for human sacrifice known (Lev. 20:2; Deut. 12:30-31; 2 Kgs. 16:3; 17:31; 23:10; Jer. 7:30-32; 19:3-5; Ezek. 16:20-21) so He would not have responded in favor of the Moabite king against Israel. Most likely if it were Yahweh the narrator would have mentioned Him by name since the authors of the Bible are always interested in giving credit to Yahweh for His actions. Only a pagan god would respond in favor of a human sacrifice and only a pagan god would be fighting for Moab in the context of the narrative. The Bible has made it clear that there are very real demonic powers behind the pagan false gods (Deut. 32:17; Ps. 82).⁵⁸

⁵⁸ See Cory Baugher, *The Divine Council of Yahweh*, at www.knowingthebible.net/topics/the-divine-council-of-yahweh.

Some scholars have accused Elisha of false prophecy since Israel ran away and was defeated by Moab. First, the narrator specifically stated that Elisha spoke what Yahweh had told him (2 Kgs. 3:15-17). Second, the text never says that Israel was defeated, only that they ran away. Third, everything that Elisha said would happen did happen and the king was left with nothing, which is why he desperately went to a human sacrifice. Fourth, this was not Elisha's lack of truthfulness but Israel's fear and lack of faith that made them run away. Yahweh promised Israel, under the leadership of Moses, that He would bring the people into the Promised Land, but they failed to have faith in Him and did not enter the Promised Land (Num. 14-15). No one accuses Yahweh of failed prophecy there nor should they accuse Elisha here.

B. Elisha Takes Care of the People (4:1-6:7)

This section records four separate narratives that turn Elisha's involvement from events of state (2 Kgs. 3) to the lives of individual Israelites. Here is where Elisha continues to look like Elijah but does more miracles and demonstrates a greater compassion for and interaction with the people.

4:1-7 A widow of a prophet of the sons of the prophets who had two sons went to Elisha for help for the debt that she could not pay now that her husband was dead. Elisha asked her what she had, to which she responded that all she had was a jar of oil. Elisha told her to gather up all the empty jars from all her neighbors and go home and fill all of them up with the oil she had. When she faithfully obeyed and the oil lasted just as the word of Yahweh had said, Elisha told her to sell it and pay her debts and then live on the rest. Just like Elijah, Elisha took care of a widow by multiplying oil.

4:8-13 Every time that Elisha had passed through Shunem, a woman and her husband who lived there would provide meals for Elisha. They eventually provided a place for him to stay. Elisha called in his servant Gehazi, who is mentioned for the first time here, to send for the woman. Elisha asked her if he could speak on her behalf to the king and make her life more comfortable in order to repay her for her hospitality. Elisha's offer to pay for received hospitality is an affront to cultural norms and an attempt to rebalance his indebtedness to her.⁵⁹ Elisha appeared discomfited by his indebtedness to the woman, and his interactions reflect some hubris on his part, for which the following events would humble him.⁶⁰ She responded by saying she had everything she needed, in that she was politically comfortable enough and had no ulterior motives in serving him. She then left the room.

4:14-17 Elisha then asked Gehazi what could be done for her. Gehazi said that they were old and had no child. Elisha then brought her back and pronounced that she would give birth to a son by this time next year. Gehazi and Elisha made a huge assumption about what the woman's needs were. She made him swear that he was not lying because she did not want to get her hopes up for nothing. Then she became pregnant and gave birth to a son just as Elisha had said.

Yet the narrative does not note the child's birth as fulfilled by Yahweh's word, but only Elijah's word. Given the subversions to the annunciation type scene, and Elisha's attempts to rebalance power relations after the hospitality, the notation may signify that Elisha had acted not out of unselfish concern but for self-serving motives, for he did not wish to be in her debt.⁶¹

4:18-30 The boy grew and sometime later became sick and died. The woman took the boy and placed him in Elisha's room and told her husband that she wanted to go out and see Elisha. In Mediterranean society such public activity was undertaken by women only on feast and holy days, making sense of the husband's surprise.⁶² She traveled twenty-five miles to Mount Carmel because she believed that Elisha could heal her boy. Elisha stated that Yahweh was not revealing to him the purpose for which she had come. She then demanded of Elisha to fix the situation for

⁵⁹ See T. R. Hobbs. "Hospitality in the First Testament and 'Teleological Fallacy,'" p. 25.

⁶⁰ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 323.

⁶¹ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 324.

⁶² See T. R. Hobbs. "Man, Woman, and Hospitality – 2 Kings 4:8-36," p. 93.

he had promised her that she would have a son. Elisha then told Gehazi to tuck his cloak in his belt, run, and lay his staff on the boy, with the assumption that he would be raised from the dead.

The narrator portrays Gehazi as a failed successor to Elisha. First, when the sons of the prophets had previously spoken to Elisha, when he was the apprentice of Elijah, they recognized his authority (2 Kgs. 2:3-8) but the woman did not recognize Gehazi's authority and refused to tell him what was wrong. Second, Gehazi could not wield the staff of Elisha with power like Elisha had wielded Elijah's cloak (1 Kgs. 2:13-14), and he could not raise the boy to life like Elijah had done (1 Kgs. 16:19-24). Gehazi had failed the tests of Elisha to be his successor, unlike Elisha who had passed all of Elijah's tests.

The woman refused to leave Elisha. Gehazi came back and reported his failure. These actions began Elijah's journey from hubris to humility. As a guest the woman broke the codes of hospitality (as Elisha had done), she spoke untruthfully to her host's servant, entered the home uninvited, and addressed her host accusatorially.⁶³ Only when the woman used the same words of commitment that Elisha had used towards Elijah (2 Kgs. 1:2, 4, 6) did Elisha leave Mount Carmel and follow the woman. Perhaps her words shamed him to take responsibility for the life he himself had promised.

4:31-37 When Elisha reached the woman's home, he shut himself in the room with the boy and prayed to Yahweh. For the first time in this chapter Elisha prayed to Yahweh. And while his prayer is not recorded, there was a clear acknowledgment that Yahweh alone could remedy the situation. Such close contact with the dead boy would have defiled Elisha (Num. 19:11) and would have also humbled Elisha.⁶⁴ The boy came to life and sneezed seven times, which would have been a symbol of uncleanness being removed from his body. He then called the woman back into the room still through Gehazi and his intermediary. Despite Elisha's journey to humility, his character remains complex and he continued to distance himself from the woman.

4:38-41 Elisha returned to Gilgal during a famine in the land and he instructed the sons of the prophets to make a stew for them to eat. One of the prophets gathered random plants and made a stew from them. When the others began to eat it, they became very ill and cried out to Elisha for rescue. Once again, the sons of prophets are portrayed as somewhat ignorant and incapable of connecting to Yahweh for a miraculous solution. Elisha threw flour, a symbol of life, into the stew and it was cleansed of poison. Elisha was able to prevent death from coming upon them.

4:42-44 Elisha then took twenty loaves of bread from a man and multiplied it to feed a hundred people. Just as he used flour to prevent death, now he multiplied flour to provide life.

5:1-7 Naaman was a highly respected commander in the Aramean army. But not only that, Yahweh had given him success in his victories. However, he had a skin disease that if it continued to spread, would cause him to lose everything, for he would be ostracized.

Many translations translate the Hebrew *tsara 'at* as "leprosy," but this not an accurate translation. The reason for this confusion came first from the fact that the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, choose the Greek word *lepra*. And second, other passages described the word *tsara 'at* as being like snow (Ex. 4:6; Num. 12:10; 2 Kgs. 5:27). Translators added "white as" to the word "snow." The word "white" is not in the Hebrew, and there is no justification for

⁶³ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 324.

⁶⁴ See T. R. Hobbs. "Man, Woman, and Hospitality – 2 Kings 4:8-36," p. 97.

adding the word “white” to the simile of “snow.” The point of comparison may be the flakiness of snow rather than the whiteness of snow. There is no evidence of leprosy in the Near East until the fifth century AD.

In one of Naaman’s raids on Israel he had captured an Israelite girl and made her his servant. Rather than being bitter and vengeful towards Naaman she directed him towards the prophet of Israel for healing. Naaman then sought permission from his king to seek out the prophet of Israel for healing. The king of Aram wrote a letter to the king of Israel and Naaman went to the king of Israel with a lot of provisions to pay for a healing. Perhaps Naaman went to the king of Israel instead of directly to the prophet because he thought the prophet was a court prophet whom the king controlled, or at least the king would know how to summon Elisha.

5:8-10 When Jehoram, the king of Israel, read the letter he panicked because he could not heal skin diseases. He thought the king of Aram was using his inability to heal as a way to lure him into a fight. His response shows a total disconnect from the prophet of Yahweh, for he never thought to go to the prophet. Likewise, his logic concerning the king of Aram’s tactics does not make sense.

When Elisha heard Jehoram’s response he told him to send Naaman to him so that Naaman would know that there was a prophet of Yahweh in Israel. Naaman went to Elisha’s house but Elisha did not invite him in or go out to speak to him. Instead he spoke to Naaman through his servant Gehazi. Elisha told Naaman to submerge himself in the Jordan River seven times and then he would be healed.

5:11-14 Naaman became very angry that Elijah had not even come out and spoken to him and healed him right there on the spot. Perhaps Naaman thought that the prophets of Israel were in control of the prophetic gift like the pagan prophets. If Elisha had appeared before Naaman, his appearance could have led Naaman to conclude that the miracle was by his power alone. Not only that, Naaman was also angry because he had been sent to the inferior, muddy, lowland Jordan River as opposed to the superior, clear, mountain top rivers of Damascus. Elisha most likely refused to meet Naaman because his pride needed to be dealt with just as much as his skin disease.

Naaman’s servant reasoned with Naaman, saying that if he were willing to do something great and difficult to be healed then he should be willing to do something small and easy to be healed. Naaman agreed and did as Elisha had commanded and was healed.

5:15-19a When Naaman returned, Elisha came out to meet him and speak to him. Naaman proclaimed that now he knew there is no God in all the world except in Israel. This was a claim to the uniqueness and exclusivity of Yahweh. Naaman offered Elisha a gift but Elisha refused it. Gifts to prophets were common (1 Sam. 9:7; 1 Kgs. 14:3) in the ancient Near East and Elisha himself elsewhere accepted gifts (2 Kgs. 8:7-9). Elisha’s refusal appears intent on directing Naaman’s thanks to Yahweh alone.

Naaman then requested some dirt of the Promised Land that Yahweh had blessed to take back to Aram so that he could stand on it when he made sacrifices to Yahweh instead of to his old gods. Then in an amazing assertion to the forgiveness of Yahweh he asked for forgiveness for when he had to go into the temple of the god Rimmon with his master. Naaman truly understood the uniqueness of Yahweh as an all-powerful and a forgiving God. Elisha granted his request and Naaman returned home. As a highly respected general he would take the gospel of Yahweh back

to Aram and influence many people, just as a simple Israelite girl had influenced this powerful man.

5:19b-27 Gehazi caught up with Naaman and deceptively asked for some provisions in the name of Elisha, saying some guests had come to his house for whom he had to provide. Gehazi's soliloquy, which is extremely rare in the Bible, shows his premeditated intent to deceive for his own selfish gain. Gehazi sought to cash in on an act of Yahweh (Josh. 7; Acts 8:18-24). Naaman granted him the request and Gehazi hid the provisions in the house.

Elisha was with him in spirit the whole time and knew what had happened. As a judgment for his greed Gehazi and his descendants were struck with Naaman's skin disease for the rest of their lives. It is clear now that Elisha would have no successor as Elijah had. No one from the sons of the prophets was up to the task. Unlike the foreigner Naaman and his servant, Gehazi showed no understanding or faith in Yahweh. He was the embodiment of Israel as a whole.

6:1-7 The sons of the prophets wanted to build a bigger place for them to gather, which is a huge development in the story because just a few years ago they were being killed off and hiding in caves (1 Kgs. 18:3-4). As they were cutting down trees one of the men who had borrowed an axe head lost it in the Jordan River. This would have been a huge financial loss (like the loss of a car). Iron was not cheap and he could not even afford to buy an axe head. He could not pay back the debt that he now owed to the person he had borrowed it from. Unpaid debts led to slavery (2 Kgs. 4:1). Elisha threw a stick into the water, which transferred its floating properties to the iron, and it floated to the top, so that the man could recover the axe head. Elisha saved the man from slavery.

Elijah told the man to "raise it out" (*ruwm*) of the water so that he could continue to build a lodge for the prophets. The hiphil imperative of the verb *ruwm* ("to raise) is only used Ex. 14:16 when Moses was to "raise" (*ruwm*) his staff to part the Red Sea and in Josh. 4:5 when the Israelites were to "raise" (*ruwm*) the stones out of the Jordan River as a memorial to Yahweh. Both of these were important crossings in Israel's history. Moses delivered Israel out of Egypt, through the Red sea, and built the tabernacle for Yahweh's people to gather in. Joshua delivered the people out of the wilderness, through the Jordan River, and built tribal territories for the people to dwell in the Promised Land. Now Elisha was delivering the prophets from false gods and oppression, through the Jordan River crossing, to build a new prophetic community for the future of Israel.

C. Elisha Brings Military Victory (6:8-8:6)

The healing of Naaman the Aramean (2 Kgs. 5) began a series of interactions with Aram as a nation (2 Kgs. 6-9). In this section Elisha continued to proclaim that Yahweh is the only power that can save, regardless of borders, and that He is a merciful God who wants to save, regardless of what nation one is from.

6:8-14 The king of Aram was at war with Israel and decided to set up his military camp in a certain location. Elisha told Jehoram the location of the Aramean camp so that he could avoid it. Every time the king of Aram moved his camp Elisha informed Jehoram. The king of Aram concluded that he had an informant in his camp. His men informed him that it was Elisha's doing. Then they found out that Elisha was in Dothan and told the king. The king sent his army to Dothan and surrounded it with the intent to capture or kill Elisha. The king's men are portrayed as knowing more than he did, and he thought that he controlled his men, but it would be Elisha who would control them.

6:15-17 When Elisha's servant saw the chariots and horses of Aram surrounding the city, he panicked and called out to Elisha. Elisha assured his servant that there were more of them than those in Aram. Elisha's declaration of "do not fear" is an admonition that comes from the context of holy war (Deut. 20:1-4). Elisha then asked Yahweh to allow the servant to see the chariots and horses of Yahweh's heavenly army. This was the reason that Israel did not need chariots and horses, because the chariots and horses of Yahweh are far greater than any army that would oppose Israel.

6:18-23 Elisha then asked Yahweh to strike the Aramean army with blindness. The word "blindness" (*canver*) is only used one other time when the people of Sodom were struck by "blindness" (*canver*) when they tried to attack Lot and his family (Gen. 19:11). Just as the Sodomites refused hospitality to the angels and were blinded by the angels to prevent their attack, so the Aramean army was blinded by the heavenly army to prevent their attack. Elisha then led the blinded Aramean army right into the city of Samaria where Jehoram was. Yahweh then opened the eyes of the Aramean army so that they could see they were surrounded by the Israelite army. Jehoram excitedly asked Elisha if he could kill the Aramean army. Elisha forbid him and commanded him to show them hospitality and feed them and then he sent them back to Aram. The king of Aram could "send" (*shalach*) his army to capture Elisha but was powerless. Elisha captured the army of Aram and "sends" (*shalach*) them back to Aram. Israel would not be like the Sodomites and refuse hospitality to the foreigner. And just like Naaman, the Aramean army would have a story to tell about the power and grace of Yahweh.

6:24-31 The siege of Samaria is contextualized in the escalating conflict between Israel and Aram (2 Kgs 5-7) for the temporal phrase "after this" suggests a separate incident.⁶⁵ When Aram came again it was in the safety of overwhelming numbers. The raiding parties had been replaced by a large-scale invasion. The famine and the siege in Samaria were so bad that an unclean donkey's brain (Lev. 11:18; Deut. 14:3-8) sold for almost 2 pounds of silver, while approximately 2 pints of dove dung, used for fuel, was valued at 2 ounces of silver. Not long ago Jehoram was serving a feast to the Aramean army and now they were starving.

As Jehoram passed the city walls a woman cried out to him for help. Jehoram lamented that he could not offer her any help from the threshing floor and winepress. The threshing floor and

⁶⁵ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 350.

winepress are elsewhere joined as symbols of Yahweh's abundance upon His covenant people (Num. 18:27, 30; Deut. 15:14; 16:13; Joel 2:24). Their emptiness speaks to Yahweh's judgment (Hos. 9:2). She cried out for justice because she and another woman had agreed to cook and eat her child and then eat the other woman's child. After they ate her child the other woman refused to offer up hers. These women had become so desperate and deprived that their logic had become corrupted and immoral. Cannibalism was a sign of covenant disobedience (Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:56-57; Ezek. 5:10). Jehoram, who could do nothing, blamed Elisha who had let the Arameans go (2 Kgs. 6:23) and just as Jezebel before him (1 Kgs. 19:2), he swore that he would execute Elisha (1 Kgs. 19:2).

6:32-7:2 Elisha, through the word of Yahweh, already knew that Jehoram had sent soldiers to kill him before they even arrived. With judgment he called Jehoram a murderer who was bent on doing evil. In a moment of satire Elisha commanded the elders to lean against the door in order to prevent Jehoram's messengers from getting in. Jehoram blamed Yahweh for their suffering and rejected His help. Elisha then declared that according to the word of Yahweh by tomorrow there would be so much food in Samaria that twelve pounds of flour would go for a shekel and 20 pounds of barley would go for a shekel. Jehoram's right hand man doubted Yahweh's declaration, therefore his judgment was that he would see it but not eat of it. Where the king could not save, Yahweh would, proving the king's lament of weakness correct.

7:3-7 Elisha then disappears from the narrative while Yahweh worked behind the scenes. There were four men with skin diseases who were living outside the city of Samaria (Lev. 13:46) who reasoned that they were going to die of starvation in or outside the city so they might as well take their chances with the Aramean army. Their plight was no less desperate than that of the cannibal mothers, but they arrived at a far more reasonable conclusion. Little did they know that the Arameans had fled their camp because Yahweh had made them hear the sound of the chariots and horses of His heavenly army. They had fled because they thought it was the Hittite and Egyptian kings attacking them. The kings of the small city states of the Neo-Hittite Empire located in northern Syria and the kings of Egypt together were powers against which Aram could never withstand.⁶⁶

7:8-11 The men with skin diseases had discovered the empty camp with all the wealth and food that the Arameans had left behind, so they began to take and eat. They then reasoned that taking without sharing it with the starving people in Samaria was not right and that they should tell the city what they had found. Once again, the outcasts had better logic and were more generous than the cannibal women of Samaria. So they shouted the news to the gatekeepers of Samaria.

7:12-16 When Jehoram heard the news he did not consider the events the work of Yahweh, nor did he consult the prophet. Rather like the Arameans, he drew the wrong conclusions and attributed the empty camp to a military ruse. One of Jehoram's officers said they should send a few men to investigate for if it was a ruse then their fate would be no different than staying in the city. The officer's logic was as unrelenting as the men with the skin disease had been.

“The worship of idols that are dumb, sightless and powerless leads Israel to conceive of God in similar categories. It is not surprising, then, that the first consideration in light of these

⁶⁶ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 353.

unusual events is not that God is working in mysterious power. Having emasculated God, he does not feature as a logical explanation for the events.”⁶⁷

When the king’s men went, they found the Aramean camp just as the men with the skin diseases had said. So the people of Samaria ate just as Yahweh had said they would. Once again Yahweh had shown himself to be true to His promises, more powerful than they could have ever imagined, and more gracious than they could ever deserve.

7:17-20 Jehoram’s right hand man, who doubted Elisha’s word, was stationed at the city gate and was trampled by the people when they ran out to get the food. He died in fulfillment of the word of Yahweh.

8:1-6 Because of the famine, Elisha had sent the Shunammite woman and her family (2 Kgs. 4:8-37) to Philistia until the famine was over. Why did Elisha send her to Philistia when every other time someone had gone there it was always portrayed as bad? After seven years she came back and went to the king to get her house and land back. It just happened that when she got there Gehazi was already with king Jehoram telling him of all the things that Elisha had done. Jehoram should already have known of all the great things that Elisha had done since the king and prophet were supposed to be working side by side leading the nation. Gehazi told Jehoram about the Shunammite woman as she was coming in. Amazed, Jehoram gave her land and house back. The narrator could be using this story to illustrate the exile that was coming that would take Israel into a foreign land, but Yahweh would be faithful to restore them to their land and houses despite their disobedience.

⁶⁷ Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 355.

D. The Reign of Jehu (8:7-10:36)

This section tells of how Elisha continued the ministry of Elijah by anointing Hazael and Jehu as kings, which was what Elijah was supposed to do (1 Kgs. 19:15-18). The coup of Jehu over the king of Israel is the longest sustained narrative in 2 Kings and emphasizes the consequences of both Elijah's and Elisha's failure to personally anoint Jehu as Yahweh had commanded. Jehu's anointing takes place in the middle of the narrative and the opening summary of his kingship is missing because his kingship was not by a normal dynastic succession.

8:7-15 Elisha went to Damascus in order to anoint Hazael as king over Aram as Elijah had been commanded by Yahweh to do but had refused (1 Kgs. 19:15-18). Elisha was probably able to freely go to Damascus in Aram's territory because he had earlier acted favorably towards Aram (2 Kgs. 5; 6:8-23) and Yahweh was with him. Ben Hadad II was the current king of Aram. He had become ill so he sought out Elisha to find out from Yahweh whether he would recover or not. Once again, the foreigner was seeking out Yahweh through the prophet where Israel's own kings were not. Hazael was Ben Hadad II's servant and went to consult Elisha. Elisha told him that Ben Hadad II would recover but he would soon die of something else.

Elisha then began to stare at Hazael and weep as he received a vision from Yahweh. He told Hazael of all the atrocities that he was going to commit against Israel when he became king. The atrocities are explained in stereotypical language (Isa. 13:16; Hos. 13:16; Amos 1:13). Later Hazael and Aram would be judged for their actions (Amos 1:3-5). But until then the coming years of warfare would bring disaster (2 Kgs. 9-13).

Hazael returned to Ben Hadad II and told him about his recovery but not about his death. That night Hazael suffocated Ben Hadad II in his sleep with a wet cloth and took the throne of Aram. The annals of Shalmaneser III (ANET 280) note the usurpation of Aram's throne by Hazael, a commoner. The judgment against the house of Israel was about to begin with the kingship of Hazael.

8:16-24 The narrator shifts to the kings of Judah. Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, reigned over Judah for eight years during the reign of Jehoram, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Ahab for he had married Ahab and Jezebel's daughter Athaliah. This was the marriage alliance that Jehoshaphat had made with Ahab (2 Chr. 18:1). The line of Ahab had intermixed with the line of David. However, Yahweh was unwilling to destroy the house of David because of His Covenant (2 Sam. 7:8-16). During his reign Edom rebelled against Judah and started a war that would go on for many years. When Jehoram died, he was succeeded by his son Ahaziah (2 Kgs. 8:25-9:29).

8:25-29 Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram, reigned over Judah for one year during the reign of Jehoram, the king of Israel. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of the house of Ahab. His mother was Athaliah the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Ahaziah met with Jehoram, the king of Israel, who was also his uncle (the brother of Athaliah and the son of Ahab), to go to war against Hazael the king of Aram. During the war Jehoram, the king of Israel, was wounded and returned to Jezreel to recover, but his army remained on the battlefield. Ahaziah, the king of Judah, joined him in Jezreel. This sets the scene for Jehu becoming king and the events of 2 Kgs. 9.

9:1-3 Elisha was going to anoint Jehu as king over Israel as Elijah had been commanded by Yahweh to do but had refused (1 Kgs. 19:15-18). Elisha had to anoint Hazael because Elijah

would not do it. Elisha was going to make the same mistake that Elijah did and assign the task to a man from the sons of the prophets. Perhaps Elisha did not go himself because he feared what Jehoram would do to him if he was caught, so he sent a junior prophet who would be less noticeable. This was the same reason that Elijah did not anoint Jehu because he was afraid of Jezebel (1 Kgs. 19). It seems unlikely Elisha who had previously been sarcastic, flippant, and judgmental with Jehoram in the past would all of the sudden be afraid but that was true of Elijah as well. Once, again the fear of the prophet would hinder the successful anointing of Jehu as will be seen.

Elisha commanded the junior prophet to take the flask of oil, find Jehu, take him into a private room, anoint him, and then run from the room. The only other king that was anointed with a “flask” (*pak*) was Saul and Samuel anointed him privately as well (1 Sam. 10:1). The narrator seems to be making an intentional connection between the failed king Saul who tried to kill the future king David and Jehu who would kill two current kings.

9:4-10 The junior prophet went to Ramoth Gilead, on the eastern side of the Jordan River, and found Jehu and took him into an inner room and anointed him. It is at this point that the junior prophet gets it all wrong. Elisha told him specifically to anoint Jehu and run with a sense of urgency, but he stayed and gave a long prophecy that went well beyond anything that Elisha had said or even Elijah who was the source of the original prophecy.

The junior prophet made two slight changes. Elisha had told him to say, “This is what Yahweh says” where the junior prophet said, “This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, says,” probably to make it clear that it is Yahweh not Baal who is Israel’s god. And Elisha told him to say, “I anoint you king over Israel” where the junior prophet said, “I anoint you over the people of Yahweh.”

But what really stands out were the additions. He took the prophecy that Elijah spoke of the house of Ahab being exterminated and Jezebel being killed (1 Kgs. 21:17-24), which had no mention of who would do it, and commanded Jehu to fulfill the prophecy and to “strike” (*nakah*) the “house of Ahab.” And the junior prophet did not repeat the curse of exposure contained in the patterned prophecy (2 Kgs. 14:11; 16:4; 21:24) for it had already been fulfilled against Ahab (1 Kgs. 22:38) but instead he formulated it against Jezebel. He also adds the statement “I will avenge the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all Yahweh’s servants shed by Jezebel” which communicates vengeance for the death of some of the sons of the prophets.

The junior prophet took an oracle against Ahab’s house and commands Jehu to execute it. Nowhere does the narrator ever state that this came from Yahweh. David made it very clear that no one had the right to kill Yahweh’s anointed king (1 Sam. 24:4-7; 26:8-11) and Yahweh condemned Baasha for exterminating the house of Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 16:7). Even though Yahweh had prophesied the destruction of Jeroboam’s house (1 Kgs. 14:6-11), He had never commanded anyone to do it. This oracle came from the junior prophet not Yahweh. Jehu now would think that he had Yahweh’s backing in exterminating the house of Ahab and killing Jezebel.

It is at this point that Elisha disappears from the narrative to appear only once more at his death (2 Kgs. 13:14-20) and the sons of the prophets are never mentioned again. When Elijah disobeyed Yahweh, he also disappeared from the narrative only to appear again right before he was taken away. Elisha’s ministry had come to an end because he passed his duty off to another. But because he did not directly disobey Yahweh’s command he would not be killed in judgment.

9:11-14a When Jehu came out his men asked him if everything was alright. They asked why the madman had come to him. They held the prophet in contempt calling him a “madman” (*mesugga*) (Jer. 29:26; Hos. 9:7). Jehu said that nothing significant had happened, which would have been hard to believe as they stared at his oil-soaked hair. He probably did not want to tell them since they may have seen his anointing as treason and killed him. But they pressed and he told them he was to be king. At this they immediately bowed before him and declared him king of Israel. The cloaks (Matt. 21:8) and trumpets (1 Kgs. 1:34; 2 Kgs. 11:14) are accompaniments to great honor. His men obviously had more respect for him than their king. “Jehu is king” is not the usual term (1 Sam. 10:24; 2 Sam. 16:16; 1 Kgs. 1:25, 31-39; 2 Kgs. 11:12) but is used when an individual seeks to establish a claim to the throne (2 Sam. 15:10). Then Jehu began to conspire against Jehoram, supposedly with Yahweh’s backing.

9:14b-20 The narrator returns to Jehoram, the king of Israel, recovering from his wounds in Jezreel with his nephew Ahaziah, the king of Judah (2 Kgs. 8:28-29). Jehu first secured Ramoth Gilead to ensure a surprise attack against Jehoram, then set out on his chariot and horses for Jezreel, which was about forty-four miles away. Jehu was already in violation of the Deuteronomic regulations for the king (Deut. 17:16).

When Jehoram saw Jehu, his general, riding towards him he did not know what to make of the urgency in Jehu’s approach. So, he sent a messenger to ride out and ask Jehu if he came with news of peace from the battle front. Jehu responded to the messenger with hostile flippancy that Jehoram knew nothing of peace and told the messenger to fall in behind him. When Jehoram saw that the messenger had not returned he sent out another and the same exchange of dialogue happened. The lookout described Jehu as driving his chariot like a “mad man” (*shigga’own*) a word whose root (*sg*) is the same used to describe the madman prophet. In this way Jehu’s actions are connected to the prophet’s commission, not Yahweh’s.⁶⁸

9:21-29 Jehoram then rode out himself to meet Jehu on the same plot of land that Ahab had taken from Naboth (1 Kgs. 21). Jehoram asked Jehu if he had come in peace. Jehu responded with hostility that there could never be peace with all the idolatry and witchcraft of Jehoram’s mother Jezebel. When Jehoram realized that he had been betrayed he fled and called a warning to Ahaziah. Jehu then shot an arrow and killed the son of Ahab on the same plot of land that Ahab had wrongly taken from Naboth (1 Kgs. 21). Then Jehu quoted an oracle “of Yahweh” to his commander Bidkar about Ahab’s family dying on this plot of land. This oracle is not mentioned anywhere else. Did Jehu fabricate it or was it a free recollection of an oracle of Elijah (1 Kgs. 21:19)? Jehu then commanded his men to kill Ahaziah. They wounded him, and he escaped to Megiddo where he died. There was no specific oracle about how Ahaziah should be killed since he belonged to the house of David, but perhaps Jehu included him in the oracle against Ahab’s house since he also technically belonged to the house of Ahab. Ahaziah was buried in Jerusalem with his ancestors in of the house of David. Through a bloody coup, Jehu was now king of Israel.

9:30-33 Jehu then moved on to Jezebel. Where had Jezebel been all this time? She had been such a dominant and unstoppable threat during the ministry of Elijah but had disappeared during the ministry of Elisha. What kind of influence did she still have as queen mother? Had Elisha dealt

⁶⁸ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 375.

with her in some way as one that had received a double portion of the Spirit of Yahweh? Jehu saw her as a legitimate threat that had to be dealt with.

When Jezebel heard what Jehu had done and how he was coming for her she did her hair and makeup in an attempt to seduce him. She was adorned as the Bible describes the prostitute (Ezek. 23:36-49). Jezebel would be connected to the prostitutes in her death just as Ahab was connected to the prostitutes in his death (1 Kgs. 22:38). She asked if Jehu had come in peace and then connected his actions to Zimri who had also assassinated his king and master (1 Kgs. 16:15-19). She may have been trying to seduce him into an alliance.

Jehu did not answer her but asked the eunuchs, who attended to her (and who could not be affected by her seduction), if they were with him or her. They signaled that they were with Jehu. He then commanded them to throw her down from the window and they obeyed. When she hit the ground, her blood splattered the wall and the horses trampled her into the ground. She died a stone's throw from the plot of land that she had wrongly taken from Naboth (1 Kgs. 21).

9:34-37 With no remorse and as if nothing had happened, he went into her palace and ate lunch. During the meal he decided to bury her since she was a noble woman. But when they went out to bury her there was nothing left of her except for her skull, feet, and hands for the dogs had consumed the rest. Jezebel was the earthly priestess and consort of Baal, which means she was the embodiment of Anath, the heavenly consort of Baal. Anath was the goddess of love and war and known for splattering the blood of her victims everywhere and taking their heads, feet, and hands as trophies. Now Jezebel (Anath) had been dealt with in the same way.

Jehu then referenced the prophecy of Elijah (1 Kgs. 21:17-24) again to justify the way that Jezebel had been dealt with. His assertion claims that none should doubt Jehu's coup for it was Yahweh's will. His reference to "dung" (*domen*) is a term that neither prophet used.

10:1-7 Jehu then wrote letters to the officials and elders of Samaria and Jezreel commanding them to fight for him against the seventy sons of Ahab that lived in their territories. Jehu's request was ambiguous for he did want Ahab's sons dead, but also wanted deniability. The officials and elders submitted to Jehu out of fear for there was no way they could not go against him if two kings could not stop him. His writing letters to the elders connects his actions to Jezebel who wrote letters to elders in order to have Naboth killed (1 Kgs. 21:8-10) This was not the way that a king of Yahweh was supposed to rule over the people of Yahweh.

10:8-17 Jehu then commanded them to bring the heads of the sons of Ahab to him in order to prove their loyalty to him. They did as he said, and he commanded them to pile the heads at the city gate for a display that would ensure the population's submission. This was an Assyrian practice (ARI 2:546; ANEP 236). Jehu had made an alliance with the Assyrians. Jehu was acting more like a tyrannical Canaanite and Assyrian king than he was like a vice regent of Yahweh. Jehu took all responsibility for the coup against Jehoram and exonerated the officials. Then he made it clear that they were responsible for the deaths of Ahab's sons, not him, so they would never be able to accuse him of injustice knowing that their hands were bloody as well. Once again, he cited the prophecy of Elijah (1 Kgs. 21:17-24) to justify his actions. One must wonder how correct was his claim that Yahweh's word applied to the wholesale slaughter of Ahab's relations. He kept quoting the prophecy as if to justify his actions that he himself knew were not in harmony with the character and will of Yahweh.

Jehu then killed all those who remained in the house of Ahab. Then he killed all the relatives of Ahaziah, the king of Judah. The significance of Jehu forming an alliance with Jehonadab shows that there were others who opposed the corruption and idolatry of the house of Ahab.

For the first time the narrator states that Jehu's actions fulfilled "the word of Yahweh spoken to Elijah." This does not mean that Yahweh approved of Jehu's actions, only that his actions fulfilled Yahweh's prophecy. Remember that the narrator said that Baasha's extermination of Jeroboam's house fulfilled the prophecy of Yahweh (1 Kgs. 15:27-30) but Yahweh also condemned Baasha for his murderous actions (1 Kgs. 16:1). There were other ways that Yahweh could fulfill His prophecies without His people committing wholesale extermination of each other.

10:18-28 Jehu then summoned the people and the prophets of Baal and told them that he would serve Baal more than Ahab had. The roots of the "to serve" and "to destroy" (*'bd*) sound identical and underline Jehu's subterfuge. Jehu promises a "great sacrifice" (*zebah gadol*) to Baal, elsewhere the term denotes a sacrifice of the false priests (1 Kgs. 13:2; 2 Kgs. 23:20). Jehu then made sure that all the prophets and priests of Baal in the entire land had come to the temple of Baal. When the temple was full, he then surrounded it with eighty of his men and told them that not one person in the temple was to escape alive.

Once the sacrifice was completed, he ordered his men into the temple to kill them all. This was obedience to the Deuteronomic Law (Deut. 13) and mirrors Elijah's slaughter of the Baal prophets at Mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:40). They demolished the sacred stone of Baal and the temple and turned the ruins into a latrine. This is the final pun on *Baal-Zebub* "Lord Dung," for Baal's temple was now a house of dung. Jehu had destroyed the house of Ahab and Baal worship in the land bringing an end to the sin of the Omride dynasty. Elisha had begun this destruction (1 Kgs. 17) but had failed to complete it (1 Kgs 19).

10:29-36 However, Jehu committed the sins of Jeroboam by worshiping the golden calves. Strangely Yahweh commended Jehu for eliminating the house of Ahab and rewarded him with four generations of descendants who would sit on the throne of Israel. Yet in Hosea 1:4-5 Yahweh condemned Jehu's extermination the house of Ahab. How is this to be reconciled? Unlike Baasha (1 Kgs. 15:27-30; 16:7) Jehu believed that Yahweh had given him permission to exterminate the house of Ahab because the prophet told him to. The prophet was the only one who knew the will of Yahweh in ancient Israel. When he got it wrong there was no way to fact check him if one was not a prophet. Post Christ, all Christians are given the indwelling of the Spirit of Yahweh and can know the will of Yahweh through prayer. This is the point of Jer. 31:31-34 when Yahweh says that everyone will know the will of Yahweh in the new covenant, unlike the old covenant.

Jehu was at the mercy of the prophet who got it wrong with no way of knowing. So, Yahweh reward him for his "obedience" to what he thought was "the word of Yahweh." Yet Jehu also went about it in a blood-thirsty, power-hungry way as if he were a madman (2 Kgs. 9:20). His motives were not for the glory of Yahweh and this was why he was condemned (Hosea 1:4-5). He was only given four generations, which was the same amount as the Omride dynasty that he had destroyed, instead of an everlasting dynasty like David (2 Sam. 7:8-16) and what Yahweh offered Jeroboam if he were faithful (1 Kgs. 11:37-38). If Jehu had truly done what was right, he would have had an everlasting dynasty as well. Jehu's true character was revealed in that he did not obey the Law of Yahweh and turned to idols (2 Kgs. 10:31). Jehu reigned over Israel twenty-

eight years, which is mentioned in the closing summary of his reign since he had no official introductory summary. When Jehu died, he was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz (2 Kgs. 13:1-9).

Though Baal worship had been eliminated, Israel continued to sin against Yahweh and go after other gods. As a result, Israel entered into a new phase of Yahweh's judgment against them that brought them one more step closer to the exile. Yahweh began to use Hazael, king of Aram, to reduce the size Israel starting with his capture of the Transjordan region.

“Despite his attacks against Baalism, Jehu does not lead the nation into separatist Yahwism. He allows the worship instituted by Jeroboam to continue. In effect, then, he expels the foreign religion (Baalism) in favor of the long-standing Israelite state religion begun by Jeroboam. Apparently he believes that reform beyond the elimination of Ahab's children, Ahab's wife, and Ahab's religion, that is, what secures his power, does not concern him. Indeed, he acts as the instrument of punishment against the corrupt Omride dynasty, but he does not operate out of Elijah-like motives. Rather, he is, like Syria, Assyria, and Babylon, an instrument that punishes but exhibits few personal moral strengths. Israel is now back to where it was before Ahab and Jezebel assumed leadership, but it has certainly not come back to the Lord.”⁶⁹

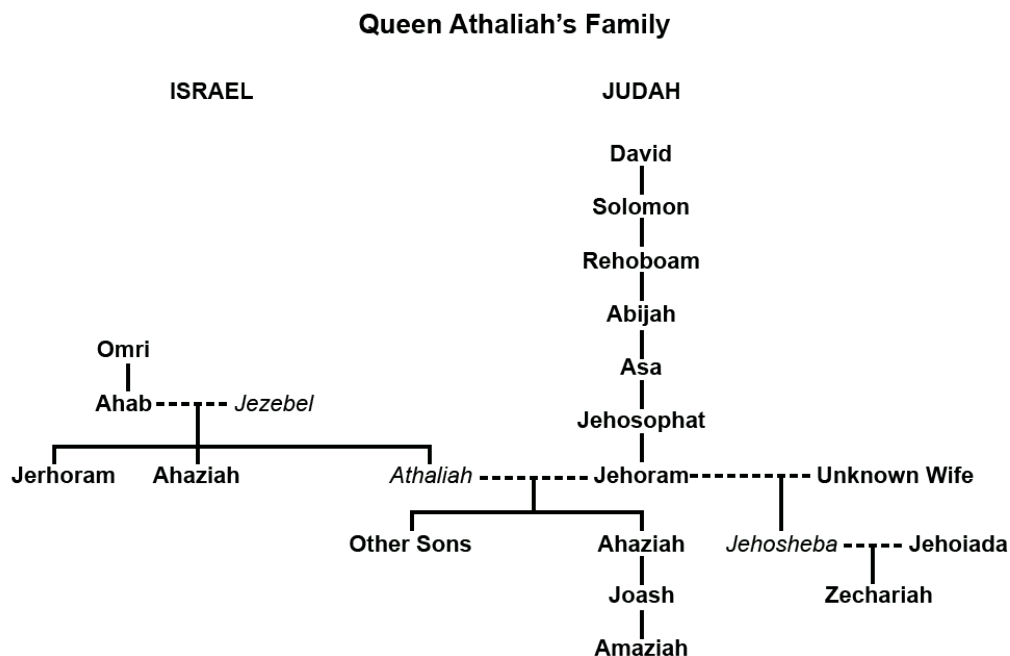
⁶⁹ Paul R. House. *1, 2 Kings*, p. 295.

V. The History of Judah and Israel until the Fall of Israel (11:1-17:41)

This division chronicles the continued moral decay and downfall of the kings of Israel until the Assyrian Empire came and took Israel (northern kingdom) into exile. The narrator continues to develop the justification of Israel's exile with a final summary (2 Kgs. 17) as to specifically why Yahweh delivered them into exile.

A. The Reign of Joash (11:1-12:21)

This section develops the aftermath of Jehu's coup and how it affected Judah. Athaliah was the last of the ruling Omrides who married into the royal line of Judah. After the death of her son Ahaziah, at the hands of Jehu, she proceeded to take revenge on the line of David by exterminating them. Only Joash escaped.



11:1-3 The narrator now shifts to the kingdom of Judah. Even though Jehu had exterminated the house of Ahab there was still Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, who would bring destruction to the house of Judah. Athaliah, enraged that her son Ahaziah, who had been killed by Jehu (2 Kgs. 9:27-29), was dead, exacted her vengeance by exterminating the house of David. Athaliah destroyed (*'abad*) all the royal family, mimicking the ferocity of Jehu, who likewise destroyed (*'abad*) his enemies (2 Kgs. 10:19).

But her sister Jehosheba took Joash, the last descendant of the royal line, and hid him away. For six years he remained hidden in the temple, a place where Athaliah was not allowed to go since she was not a priest. Jehosheba was the wife of Jehoiada, the high priest (2 Chr. 22:11), so her care for Joash in the temple would not raise suspicions. During this time Athaliah ruled the kingdom of Judah. As both an Omride and a woman, her rule was illegitimate and the narrator never refers to her as a queen, nor provides an introductory summary of her "reign."⁷⁰

⁷⁰ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 388.

11:4-12 In the seventh year Jehoiada, the high priest, brought select members of the commanders and guards and swore them to a covenant of secrecy before he revealed the hidden Joash to them. He then assigned those who were on duty to guard the palace and city gates and those who were going off duty to guard the temple. Jehoiada probably picked the Sabbath because no one would suspect a coup on the Sabbath and there would be many people at the temple to witness and support the revealing of Joash as king. It is clear that he had been carefully planning this for a long time. Jehoiada's plan began in the temple and from that holy sanctuary the action moved progressively outwards, cleansing and restoring covenantal life. The commanders and guards all did what he commanded. Jehoiada revealed Joash to the public, crowned him king, gave him a copy of the covenant law, and the people received and celebrated his coronation.

11:13-16 When Athaliah heard the noise she came out to see Joash being crowned as king without her knowledge. Ironically, what she mourned as "treason" was really a covenantal act. Without hesitation, Jehoiada commanded that Athaliah be executed and the commanders obeyed.

Jehoiada made a covenant with Yahweh, the king, and the people that they would obey and serve Yahweh and he made a covenant between the king and the people. In the phrase "that they would be Yahweh's people" echoes the Sinai covenant (Ex. 19-20) and Deut. 27:1-10 (Deut. 7:6; 14:2). Then they all went together and destroyed the Baal temple in Judah. Jehoiada took Joash to the palace and sat him on the throne and the people rejoiced. Judah was now at peace because Athaliah was dead. Just as the Omrides and Baal had been removed in the north by Jehu now they had been removed in the south by Jehoiada. As the legitimate Davidic king, Joash's enthronement mirrors Solomon's enthronement (1 Kgs. 1).

12:1-16 Joash reigned over Judah for forty years during the reign of Jehu, the king of Israel. His Omride father is not mentioned. He did right in the eyes of Yahweh all the years that Jehoiada instructed him. However, he did not tear down the high places. Sometime during his reign, Joash commanded that the money in the temple should be collected in order to pay for repairs to the temple. But the priests did not want to spend money on the temple. It is likely that they were diverting funds to themselves. Except for Shishak's theft of the temple treasures (1 Kgs. 14:25-26), this is the first time that the temple has been mentioned since Solomon built it (1 Kgs. 5-8).

In the twenty-third year of Joash's reign he realized that nothing had been done to the temple. It either took Joash a long time to decide to repair the temple or a long time to discover that nothing had been done. Joash rebuked the priests and told them to hand over the money and responsibility for the repair of the temple to others. That Joash did not notice for a while that the temple had not been repaired, and the lengthy description and time that it took to raise money, seems to suggest that the repair of the temple was not Joash's highest priority.

12:17-21 When Hazael attacked Jerusalem, Joash took all the money from the temple that he had collected for its repair and paid Hazael to leave Jerusalem. 2 Chr. 24:17-27 tells of when Jehoiada died (2 Kgs. 12:2), Joash did evil, even killing Jehoiada's son who Yahweh lifted up as a prophet against Joash. This was why his officials killed him. The only other Judean king that died violently in battle was Ahaziah the grandson of Ahab. Joash had failed to live up the requirements of the covenant. When Joash died, he was succeeded by his son Amaziah (2 Kgs. 14:1-22).

B. The Reigns of the Later Kings of Israel and Judah (13:1-17:41)

In Israel four coups take place over twenty years. In the same period only two southern monarchs reign and succession passes without hindrance. Israel was declining and was in desperate need of a deliverer. 2 Kgs. 13 ends with the question unanswered as to whether a “deliverer” can really be expected, and if so, who that deliverer might be. The question continues beyond the lives of Hazael and Elisha and is answered in 2 Kgs. 14.

13:1-9 The narrator now shifts to the kings of Israel. Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, reigned over Israel for seventeen years during the reign of Joash, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Jeroboam. Therefore, Yahweh allowed Hazael and his son Ben Hadad III to dominate him during his entire reign.

Surprisingly, Jehoahaz turned to Yahweh and cried out for relief from the oppression of Hazael. This was also different from Joash’s response to Hazael when he took money from the temple to pay off Hazael. Yahweh listened and sent a deliverer who freed Israel from the power of Aram. His son Jehoash (2 Kgs. 13:10-25) is the intended deliverer but only provided partial relief. However, Yahweh’s gracious intervention makes no difference to Israel’s outlook and idolatrous practices. Yahweh also allowed Jehoahaz’s chariots and horses to be destroyed. When Jehoahaz died, he was succeeded by his son Jehoash (2 Kgs. 13:10-25).

13:10-13 Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, reigned over Israel for sixteen years during the reign of Joash, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Jeroboam. Jehoash warred with Amaziah, the king of Judah. The peace that had been established between Ahab and Jehoshaphat no longer existed between Israel and Judah. This peace may have been brought to an end when Jehu, the king of Israel, assassinated Ahaziah, the king of Judah (2 Kgs. 9:27-29). War between Israel and Judah would last for the final 119 years (841-722 BC) of the kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs. 9:27-17:41). When Jehoash died, he was succeeded by his son Jeroboam (2 Kgs. 14:23-29).

13:14 Elisha, now sick and at the end of his life, comes back into the narrative. And even though the death of Jehoash has already been mentioned the narrator flashbacks to an exchange between him and Elisha. Just like Elisha’s becoming a prophet was outside the narrative reigns of the kings (2 Kgs. 2) so, his death is also outside the narrative reigns of Kings, showing that Elisha’s ministry was subject to no king. Also, by placing Elisha’s death after the death of the Omride family (2 Kgs. 9:14-10:17; 11:13-16) rather than after he was last mentioned (2 Kgs. 9:1-3), the narrator shows that Elisha, the prophet of Yahweh, outlived the dynasty of Omri. When Jehoash saw that Elisha was dying, he cried out “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” This was the same thing Elisha had cried out at the beginning of his ministry when Elijah was being taken away (2 Kgs. 2:12).

13:14-19 Elisha commanded Jehoash to take a bow and arrow and shoot the arrow out the east window. Elisha then put his hands on the Jehoash’s hands showing him that they would be victorious only when they worked together as prophet and king. Jehoash shot the arrow that represented the victory that Yahweh would give Israel over Aram. Elisha then commanded him to strike the ground with the arrows. Jehoash struck the ground three times and stopped. Elisha got mad at him for not striking the ground more times, which would have given him total victory over Aram. It is not clear how Jehoash was supposed to know that he should have struck the ground more times, but Elisha seems to expect that Jehoash should have known. Perhaps the point was that Elisha’s hands were not on his hands this time and so he was not successful.

Jehoash was the deliverer that his father Jehoahaz had prayed for (2 Kgs. 13:4-5), but he would only provide partial relief.

13:20-25 Elisha died and was buried with no successor. Every spring the Moabites raided Israel and took their food supplies. One day the Moabites came while some Israelites were burying a man and afraid for their lives, they threw the dead man into the tomb of Elisha and ran away. When the dead body touched Elisha's bones the man came back to life. Nothing more is mentioned about the man so that the focus remains on Elisha. This shows that the word of Yahweh has power to provide life in the living world and in the grave. This is a symbolic promise that Yahweh would "resurrect" Israel out of their exile and bring them back to the Promised Land.

Hazael of Aram continued to oppress Israel, but Yahweh had compassion on Israel and gave them relief from Hazael because of His Abrahamic Covenant with them. Hazael died and was succeeded by his son Ben Hadad III. Jehoash took back all the cities from Ben Hadad III that his father Hazael had taken from Israel. Once again, there is a promise of restoration after exile.

14:1-4 The narrator now shifts to the king of Judah. Amaziah, the son of Joash, reigned over Judah for twenty-nine years during the reign of Jehoash, the king of Israel. He did right in the eyes of Yahweh, but was not as righteous as David had been. And he did not tear down the high places. The dates for Amaziah, Azariah and Jeroboam (2 Kgs. 14:1, 23; 15:1) are misaligned with a gap of 12 years between the end of Amaziah's rule (in Jeroboam's fifteenth year; 2 Kgs. 14:1, 23) and the start of Azariah's rule (in Jeroboam's twenty-seventh year; 2 Kgs. 15:1). A co-regency of Amaziah and Azariah began in 792 BC, as well as a co-regency of Jehoash and Jeroboam began in 793 BC. By this reckoning the last fourteen years of Amaziah's rule are shared with his son, perhaps with Amaziah in retirement after Israel's victory.⁷¹

14:5-7 After Joash's assassination (2 Kgs. 12:20-21), Amaziah had to consolidate his power, possibly against vying political or religious factions. He executed all those who had assassinated his father Joash. His execution of the officials was not a blood vengeance for the almost verbatim citation of Deut. 24:16 places Amaziah in a positive light. Amaziah then put down the Edomite rebellion that had begun under Jehoram (2 Kgs. 8:20-22).

14:8-14 Amaziah began to taunt Jehoash to goad Jehoash into fighting him. There is no apparent reason given in the book of Kings for Amaziah's hostility. 2 Chr. 25:5-20 tells how Yahweh pronounced judgment against Amaziah for bringing back the worship of the idols of the Edomites after his defeat of Edom. During his defeat of Edom, soldiers of Israel attacked Judah while he was gone. Yahweh used Amaziah's desire for vengeance and pride to lure him into being defeated by Israel as judgment for his idolatry. Jehoash tried to avoid the fight but Amaziah would not listen. So, Jehoash defeated Amaziah and captured him, then tore down a section of Jerusalem's wall, entered the city, and took the gold and silver in the palace and the temple. This is a foreshadow of what the Babylonians would one day do to Jerusalem.

14:15-16 The narrator seems to have included this second mention of Jehoash's death here because of the unusual situation that existed after the Israelites took Amaziah prisoner. When Jehoash died, Israel released Amaziah.

⁷¹ See Edwin R. Thiele. *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 106-116.

14:17-22 Like his father, Amaziah was assassinated by his own people and they made his son Azariah king (2 Kgs. 15:1-7). Azariah did not avenge his father's assassination (as Amaziah did with his father Joash) and thus may be implicated.

14:23-29 The narrator now shifts to the kings of Israel. Jeroboam, the son of Jehoash, reigned over Israel for forty-one years during the reign of Amaziah, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Jeroboam. Jeroboam's rule is the longest of any northern monarch (only the Judahite reigns of Azariah and Manasseh are longer). Jeroboam restored much of the land of Israel that had been taken from them under previous kings. The borders of Israel being restored by an idolatrous king of a nation under the judgment of Yahweh does not seem to fit the retributive theology of the First Testament. First, Yahweh delivered Israel through Jeroboam to fulfill the promise that He had made to Jehoahaz (2 Kgs. 13:4-5). Second, Israel's expanded borders are credited to the word of Jonah or Amittai, a prophet. Third, the deliverance occurred because of Yahweh's compassion.⁷² When Jeroboam died, he was succeeded by his son Zechariah (2 Kgs. 15:8-12). There is no record of Amaziah's burial, perhaps a slight against his being named after the first Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 12-14).

“How easy it would be to draw erroneous conclusions from the northern kingdom's successes. The narrative reveals those successes in several ways: the northern kingdom overshadows the southern kingdom, overreaching it militarily. Amaziah's reign is structured so as to foreground the northern King Jehoash. Jehoash shows wisdom alongside Amaziah's proud imprudence. Jeroboam is the long-awaited deliverer. The prophetic word assures his success, and by him Israel's borders approximate those of the Davidic and Solomonic eras. If one were to measure a nation's righteousness or deservedness by material markers, the northern kingdom would be given top honors. A more careful reading reveals the true story. The northern kingdom's success is in no way linked to their deservedness or righteousness – even the deliverer Jeroboam walks in the sins of his namesake. It is only YHWH's graciousness and his commitment to ancient promises that Israel succeeds militarily or a deliverer is given. The ongoing Jehu dynasty remains only by YHWH's word, and the powerful prophetic word of Jonah comes by YHWH. It is by these gracious enactments on YHWH's part that Israel finds success.”⁷³

15:1-7 The narrator now shifts to the king of Judah. Azariah (also known as Uzziah), the son of Amaziah, reigned over Judah for fifty-two years during the reign of Jeroboam, the king of Israel. In the book of Kings, he is generally named Azariah although Uzziah also appears (2 Kgs. 15:13, 20, 32, 34). Elsewhere he is named Uzziah (2 Chr. 26-27; Amos 1:1; Hos. 1:1; Isa. 1:1; 6:1; 7:1). These names come from two roots bearing a close semantic relationship meaning “strength” and “victory” and should be considered variants rather than being a personal and a throne name.⁷⁴ Azariah did right in the eyes of Yahweh, just as his father Amaziah had. But he did not tear down the high places. Yahweh struck him with a skin disease because of his pride (2 Chr. 26:16-20). Azariah's non-contagious disease did not require his isolation, although he was released from governing responsibilities. These were vested to Jotham. The lack of details show stability of Azariah's reign during illness and co-regency. This is contrasted to the instability of the north. When Azariah died, he was succeeded by his son Jotham (2 Kgs. 15:32-38).

⁷² See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 421.

⁷³ Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, pp. 421-422.

⁷⁴ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 427.

15:8-12 The narrator now shifts to the kings of Israel. Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam, reigned over Israel for six months during the reign of Azariah, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Jeroboam. Shallum assassinated Zechariah in front of the people of Israel and took the throne. This fulfilled the word of Yahweh that Jehu's descendants would sit on the throne for four generations (2 Kgs. 10:30). Zechariah's summary omits the notice of death, burial, and succeeding son, for the sinful dynasty had come to an end in fulfillment of the prophetic word.

15:13-16 Shallum reigned over Israel for one month during the reign of Uzziah (Azariah), the king of Judah. Then Menahem assassinated him. Shallum's summary omits the notice of death, burial, and succeeding son, for he had taken the throne through assassination. Menahem barbarically attacked his own people because they refused to receive him as their king.

15:17-22 Menahem reigned over Israel for ten years during the reign of Azariah, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Jeroboam. Pul, the throne name of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) the Assyrian king, invaded Israel and Menahem gave silver to Pul to form an alliance. Tiglath-Pileser III transformed Assyria from a collection of city states to the first and one of the most ruthless and oppressive empires the world had ever seen. Jehu's dynasty took a pro-Assyrian stance. If Shallum represented an anti-Assyrian party that would explain the reason behind Menahem's coup. Menahem paid Pul to leave Israel alone but this investment would not last long. Yahweh had already decreed the fall of Israel to the Assyrian empire that would happen in 722 BC. When Menahem died, he was succeeded by his son Pekahiah (2 Kgs. 15:23-26).

15:23-26 Pekahiah, the son of Menahem, reigned over Israel for two years during the reign of Azariah, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Jeroboam. His officer Pekah assassinated him and took the throne. Pekahiah's summary omits the notice of death, burial, and succeeding son.

15:27-31 Pekah reigned over Israel for twenty years during the reign of Azariah, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, committing the sins of Jeroboam. During his reign Tiglath-Pileser III took most of the lands of Israel and deported most of the people into exile. Then Hoshea assassinated him and took the throne. Pekah's summary omits the notice of death, burial, and succeeding son.

“Azariah's fifty-second year is 740 BC. This presents chronological difficulties, for if Pekah's twenty-year reign begins in that year it would not conclude until after Israel fell to Assyria (dated to 722 BC), and would leave no room for Hoshea's reign. One solution calculates Pekah's rule from 752 to 732 BC, making his rule concurrent with and rival to the rules of Menahem and Pekahiah (Thiele 1983: 129; cf. Oded 1972: 162-163; Cogan and Tadmor 1988: 179); another proposes that Pekah took the throne in 740 BC but sought to bolster his claim by calculating his regnal years back to Shallum, disregarding the reigns of Menahem and Pekahiah (De Vries, IDB 1:589). This dual dating for Pekah's reign (accession in 740 BC and regnal years 752-732 BC) provides a framework within which the remaining chronological problems find a reasonable resolution.”⁷⁵

15:32-38 The narrator now shifts to the kings of Judah. Jotham, the son of Uzziah (Azariah), reigned over Judah for sixteen years during the reign of Pekah, the king of Israel. He did right in

⁷⁵ Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 430.

the eyes of Yahweh, as his father Uzziah had. But he did not tear down the high places. He repaired the Upper Gate of the temple which was presumably damaged in the course of Jehoash's incursion into Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 14:11-14). In those days Yahweh began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah. This was the beginning of the Syro-Ephraimite alliance, which features prominently in Isa. 7-9. When Jotham died, he was succeeded by his son Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16:1-20).

16:1-9 Ahaz, the son of Jotham, reigned over Judah for sixteen years during the reign of Pekah, the king of Israel. Unlike David, he did not do right in the eyes of Yahweh. That Jotham was still ruling at the end of Pekah's twentieth year (2 Kgs. 15:27, 30) suggests a co-regency (735-732 BC) between Jotham and his son Ahaz. Ahaz's sixteen-year rule is thus calculated from the commencement of his sole regency.⁷⁶ Ahaz worshiped the pagan gods and even sacrificed his sons in the fire to his gods (Deut. 18:9-13). Jehoram's conduct is attributed to his marriage alliance into the family of Ahab. No explanation is given for Ahaz's conduct, making his deviance even more heinous. Ahaz's sin was worse because he practiced abominations; particularly defiling sins (Lev. 18:24-30). Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah attacked Jerusalem but did not succeed. Ahaz then paid Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) to attack Aram and Israel. Why would he think that would work out for him in the long run when it had not worked for Israel? Tiglath-Pileser III attacked Aram, killed Rezin, and deported the people of Aram.

16:10-11 Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser III and there saw the Aramaean altar and replicated it in Jerusalem. Assyria did not impose religious observations on subdued nations. The altar was not Assyrian so perhaps it was dedicated to the Aramean god Rimmon.⁷⁷ He then moved the bronze altar of Yahweh behind his new altar and made sacrifices on the new altar. He then made alterations to the temple in order to please Tiglath-Pileser III. Never before has a Judean king taken it upon himself to redesign the Solomonic temple in such a way. When Ahaz died, he was succeeded by his son Hezekiah (1 Kgs. 18:1-20:21).

17:1-6 The narrator now shifts to the last king of Israel. Hoshea reigned over Israel for nine years during the reign of Ahaz, the king of Judah. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh like the kings before him. Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), the king of Assyria after Tiglath-Pileser III, attacked and imprisoned Hoshea for failing to pay the tribute and seeking an alliance with Egypt. He captured Samaria and deported all the Israelites in the kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. Hoshea's summary omits the notice of death, burial, and succeeding son.

17:7-23 The narrator now gives a lengthy reflection on Israel's demise. First the narrator discusses the reason for the deportation of Israel (2 Kgs. 17:7-23) and then the deportation of foreigners into the land of Israel (2 Kgs. 17:24-41). Both revolve around the same themes of salvation out of Egypt (2 Kgs. 17:7, 36), the covenant (2 Kgs. 17:15, 35), the call to fear no other gods (2 Kgs. 17:7, 35, 37-38), obedience to the Torah (2 Kgs. 17:13, 15, 34, 37), and the failure to listen (2 Kgs. 17:14, 40), which leads to covenantal disobedience (2 Kgs. 17:7-12, 15-17, 21-22, 34, 40-41).

⁷⁶ See Edwin R. Thiele. *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, p. 133.

⁷⁷ See John William McKay. *Religion in Judah Under the Assyrians 732-609 BC*, pp. 5-12; Morton Cogan. *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B. C. E.*, pp. 74-77.

The narrator cites three general wrongs for why Yahweh deported Israel. They sinned against Yahweh who had chosen them and delivered them from Egypt, they took up the idolatrous practices of the pagan nations, and they walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. After noting the sins in general a catalogue of specific sins is given. The phrase *khol tsva' hashamayim*, (“all the host of heaven”), refers to the stars and planets. In 1 Kgs. 22:19 these heavenly bodies are pictured as members of the Yahweh’s royal court or assembly, but many other texts view them as the illegitimate objects of pagan and Israelite worship.

During all of this time Israel ignored Yahweh’s warnings made through the prophets. The narrator then makes the profound comment that “they followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless” (2 Kgs. 17:15). You can never be greater than the thing that you worship. And if you worship flawed, violent, and empty idols that are worthless and unable to guide and save you in life then you will become the same thing. The narrator’s reflections then turn to a long history of Yahweh’s gracious warnings. Then the warning turns to Judah to not repeat the sins of Israel.

17:24-41 Shalmaneser V died in 722 BC shortly after his conquest. His successor Sargon II (722-705 BC) carried out the deportation of the Israelites. The king who followed him and began to attack Judah during the reign of Hezekiah was Sennacherib (705-681 BC). Once the king of Assyria had deported all the Israelites out of Israel, he then brought people that he had deported from other nations and resettled them in Israel. These pagan foreigners did not worship Yahweh, so Yahweh punished them by sending lions among them to kill them. This was then reported to the Assyrian king. The king ordered one of the priests of Israel who had been deported to be returned to Israel and teach the people about who Yahweh was and how to worship Him. The assumption that he made was that Yahweh was a localized god. The irony is that the pagan, tyrannical king had ordered that people learn about Yahweh. However, the pagans merely mixed the worship of Yahweh with their pagan gods. 2 Kgs. 17:25-33 is not a passage to be taken at face value. The narrator is setting up a particular view in order to demolish it. It should be read with quotations added to the words “worship” and “worshiped.”⁷⁸

⁷⁸ See Ian W. Provan. *1 and 2 Kings*, pp. 250-251.





VI. The History of Judah until the Fall of Jerusalem (18:1-25:30)

This division chronicles the righteous reign of Hezekiah but then the moral decay and downfall of the kings of Judah until the Babylonia Empire came and took Judah (southern kingdom) into exile. The narrator continues to develop the justification of Judah's exile, which also led to the downfall of the royal line of Judah.

A. The Reign of Hezekiah (18:1-21:26)

Hezekiah was a righteous king unlike any other king in Israel and Judah. The irony is that his reign was the reason that Yahweh delivered Judah from the Assyrian captivity but delivered them into the Babylonian captivity.

18:1-8 The narrator now shifts to the final kings of Judah. Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, reigned over Judah for twenty-nine years during the reign of Hoshea, the king of Israel. Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh as David had before him. He was the first king who tore down all the high places in Judah and destroyed all the idols. He even destroyed the bronze serpent pole that Yahweh had commanded Moses to make and destroy but the people had never destroyed it (Num. 21:4-9). Hezekiah trusted in Yahweh and there was no one as godly as Hezekiah of all the kings of Israel, including David. Hezekiah also “clings” (*dabaq*) to Yahweh, which is a particularly Deuteronomistic quality (Deut. 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Josh. 22:5; 23:8). He never stopped following Yahweh and as a reward Yahweh gave him success in everything he did. Only of David and Hezekiah is it said that “Yahweh was with him” (1 Sam. 16:18; 18:12, 14; 2 Sam. 5:10; 2 Kgs. 18:7). And unlike many kings before him he rebelled against the king of Assyria and drove the Philistines all the way to Gaza.

18:9-16 In the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) put Samaria, the capital of Israel (northern kingdom), under siege for three years before conquering it. Sargon II (722-705 BC) carried out the deportation of the Israelites into exile. In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign (701 BC) Sennacherib (705-681 BC) undertook his third campaign against the rebellion of many nations in the Levant. Hezekiah, fearing the Assyrians, stopped rebelling against Sennacherib and paid him a bribe from the temple treasures. However, in the end it was not the tribute but Yahweh's intervention that affected the withdrawal. This is what 2 Kgs. 18-19 covers.

18:17-37 Once Sennacherib and Hezekiah are identified, the narrator consistently refers to Sennacherib only as the “king” and no honorific title is provided for Hezekiah. This communicates the military superiority and power of Assyria over Hezekiah.⁷⁹ Sennacherib was at Lachish in the north and sent his representatives to Jerusalem to demand that Hezekiah surrender. Three of Hezekiah's officials went out to talk with Sennacherib's commanders. All the people of the city heard what Sennacherib's commander said.

The first question that Sennacherib asked Hezekiah was what he was basing his confidence on that he thought he could stand against Assyria and who was his ally that would defend him. If it was Egypt that was unwise, for Egypt was like a splintered reed that stabbed everyone who put their trust in Egypt in the back. If it was Yahweh that was also unwise, for Hezekiah had torn down all of Yahweh's high places. Sennacherib assumed that Yahweh was like all the other gods

⁷⁹ See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 467.

and wanted many high places where he would be worshiped. He did not realize that Yahweh was different and had commanded the destruction of the high places. Sennacherib then stated that Hezekiah had no hope of standing against Assyria even if he gave him 2,000 horses. Even Yahweh had commanded Sennacherib to attack and defeat Judah. Most likely this claim came from listening to the prophets but misunderstanding the details.

Hezekiah's officials asked the commander to only speak in Aramaic so that the people would not understand what was being said, but the commander refused. At that point the commander addressed them in the plural hoping to turn public sentiment against Hezekiah. The commander spoke to the people and told them to not trust in Hezekiah who was saying that Yahweh would protect them. Then the commander told the people to make peace with Assyria and they would be given land and food, which was a lie as seen by what they did to Israel. Then Sennacherib, through his commander, insulted Yahweh and denied his sovereignty by saying that He would not be able to save Judah any more than the other gods had been able to save their own people from Assyria. Yahweh's response to this insult would account for Assyria's failure to take Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 19:27-28). The people said nothing, and Hezekiah's officials reported to him what Sennacherib had said.

19:1-7 When Hezekiah heard this he mourned and immediately went into the temple and cried out to Yahweh. He then sent his officials to Isaiah the prophet to intercede on Israel's behalf. Unlike so many kings that came before Hezekiah, he showed himself to be a man of God by immediately going to Yahweh for help. Yahweh then spoke through Isaiah and said that He was going to make Sennacherib return to his home where he would die because he had spoken out against Yahweh.

19:8-13 Yahweh's method of deliverance was causing rebellions. First there was a rebellion against Assyria in Libnah, a few miles northeast of Lachish, and then Sennacherib received word that the king of Cush (southern Egypt) was coming to attack from the southwest, the direction opposite from Libnah and Jerusalem. Thus, he had to suspend his siege against Jerusalem. Once again Sennacherib insulted the sovereignty of Yahweh when he told the people of Judah not to be deceived when Yahweh said that they would be safe. None of the other gods had been able to protect their people.

19:14-19 Once again Hezekiah immediately went to Yahweh for help, but this time he did not ask Isaiah to pray but prayed himself. Hezekiah praised Yahweh for being the only sovereign God over all of creation. He then acknowledged that it was true that the other gods did not save their people from the Assyrians, but it was because they were not all powerful like Yahweh is. He asked Yahweh to deliver them so that all the other nations would know that Yahweh was the only true sovereign God of creation.

19:20-28 Then Yahweh sent word to Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah. The virgin daughter of Zion are the people of Yahweh that live in Judah. Yahweh declared that Jerusalem mocked Sennacherib because he thought he was great, but he did not stand a chance against Yahweh who had put His name in Jerusalem. Sennacherib had taken credit for all of his accomplishments and his ability to destroy the nations, but it was Yahweh who had given him that power and his victories over the nations as a judgment for their sins. Because Sennacherib did not acknowledge and submit to Yahweh as the source of his power and ability Yahweh was going to drive him out of the land and do to him what he had done to the nations. Hooks and bridle bits are ancient Near Eastern imagery of slavery and deportation. (Ezek. 38:4; ANET 300; 447)

19:29-33 Isaiah then gave Jerusalem a sign that the prophecy would come to pass. The people of Jerusalem had not been able to plant crops because of the Assyrian siege, so Yahweh promised to feed His people for two years with the crops that came up naturally, which was a covenant blessing for trust in Yahweh (Deut. 28:33). In the third year they would return to their fields to sow and reap the crops. Then Yahweh declared that Sennacherib would not enter Jerusalem but would return home.

19:35-37 That night an angel of Yahweh went through Sennacherib's camp and put to death 185,000 soldiers, much like the night before the exodus in Egypt (Ex. 12:29-30). Overwhelmed by the supernatural attack, Sennacherib left Jerusalem and returned to Nineveh. Then he was assassinated by his own sons in the temple of his god Nisroch, who may be Marduk or Nusku.⁸⁰ Sennacherib had favored his younger son Esarhaddon and sibling rivalry apparently existed as Esarhaddon struggled to secure the throne upon his father's death (ANET 289-290). Ironically the Assyrian king suffered assassination in the temple of his god who was not able to protect him. This was the very thing he had charged Yahweh with being unable to do for Judah.

20:1-11 The events of 2 Kgs. 20 most likely happened before the events of 2 Kgs. 18-19 (701 BC). The first episode (2 Kgs. 20:1-11) explains how Hezekiah's faith spared Judah from exile under the Assyrians. The second episode (2 Kgs. 20:12-19) explains why Hezekiah's lack of trust in Yahweh would bring exile under the Babylonians. By placing this episode last the narrative ends in a more negative way and prepares the reader for the final chapters of the book of Kings. The fall of Jerusalem is certain and even a righteous king contributes to its certainty.

"The thematic parallels between the two vignettes are highlighted by the repetition of the terms 'hear' (sm'; vv. 5, 12) and 'see' (r'h; vv. 5, 12-15 [five times]). In the first instance YHWH both hears and sees Hezekiah's petition and graciously responds when Hezekiah (who trusts YHWH, 18:5) prays. In the second, the words take on negative connotations, for Merodach-Baladan's visit is precipitated by hearing of Hezekiah's illness. During that visit Hezekiah's trust is displaced from YHWH to the foreign king. It is this action on Hezekiah's part that precipitates YHWH's word of judgment."⁸¹

Isaiah was sent to Hezekiah to inform him that he would not recover from his illness and should get his affairs in order. Like before, Hezekiah immediately prayed to Yahweh for healing. Though his response was very godly his prayer was more self-centered stressing his own righteousness. Yahweh was so quick to respond to Hezekiah that He sent Isaiah back before he could even leave the palace. Yahweh told Hezekiah that He had heard his prayer and that He was going to add fifteen more years to his life and protect Judah. Then Isaiah applied a poultice of figs to Hezekiah's boils and he was healed.

Hezekiah asked for a sign to validate the prophecy. Yahweh gave Hezekiah a choice between seeing the shadow of the sun go back or forward ten steps. Hezekiah chose back ten steps since this was not the natural movement of the shadow of the sun.

20:12-19 Judah was one of the only nations that had not been deported by the Assyrians and was growing in strength because of Yahweh's blessing for Hezekiah's faithfulness. Babylon was seeking to rebel against Assyria and Marduk-Baladan of Babylon was most likely sending gifts to Hezekiah in order to form an alliance against Assyria. Hezekiah, in a desire to be included in

⁸⁰ See John Gray. *I & II Kings*, pp. 694-695.

⁸¹ Lissa M. Wray Beal. *I & 2 Kings*, p. 480.

an alliance, brought the Babylonian envoys to his city in order to show them all his wealth, what he could contribute to the alliance. After Yahweh had delivered Hezekiah from the Assyrian army, he was now looking to the might of Babylon to protect him instead of Yahweh.

Yahweh sent Isaiah to confront Hezekiah on his lack of trust. As a judgment for Hezekiah showing off to Babylon, Babylon would one day come and take it all. Also, some of Hezekiah's descendants would be carried off to Babylon and made eunuchs, meaning they would not be able to continue on the family line. The exile of Judah was now coming. Hezekiah was selfishly satisfied that it would not happen in his lifetime. There is no acknowledgement or repentance of his folly in trusting in the riches of Jerusalem for deliverance and there is none of his previous concern for the ongoing welfare of Jerusalem. When Hezekiah died, he was succeeded by his son Manasseh (2 Kgs. 21:1-18).

21:1-9 Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, reigned over Judah for fifty-five years. Manasseh is the longest ruling southern king. He began his co-regent with Hezekiah (696-686 BC) before ruling as sole regent (686-642 BC). Unlike his father he did evil in the eyes of Yahweh. First, he rebuilt all the high places that his father had torn down. Second, he built Baal altars and Asherah poles just as Ahab had done. Third, he worshiped all the gods of the starry hosts. Fourth, he even built altars to the gods in the temple of Yahweh. Fifth, he sacrificed his own children to the gods. Sixth, he practiced all the pagan practices of divination and consulted mediums. Manasseh is uniquely compared to the notorious northern kings. Manasseh and Ahab are the only two kings that the narrator states had “acted abominably” or “committed abominations” in worshiping idols as the Amorites had (1 Kgs. 21:26; 2 Kgs. 21:11).

21:1-15 Manasseh did more evil than all the nations that surrounded Israel. Yahweh then declared that He was going to bring the same disaster upon Judah that He had brought on Israel for their sins. The destruction would be so complete it would be like someone cleaning a plate after a meal. Manasseh killed so many innocent people in Jerusalem that almost every street had a memory of someone dying as a result of his actions. He is the only king of Judah whose misdeeds are specifically mentioned in the closing summary. When Manasseh died, he was succeeded by his son Amon (2 Kgs. 21:19-26).

21:19-26 Amon, the son of Manasseh, reigned over Judah for twenty-two years. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh and worshiped the same gods and committed the same sins as his father before him. He was so hated that his own official assassinated him. But the people of Judah killed those officials and made Amon's son Josiah king (2 Kgs. 22:1-23:30).

B. The Reign of Josiah (22:1-23:30)

The reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah were the peak of righteous ruling in Judah. Josiah was even more righteous and thorough in elimination of idolatry. However, because Judah had been sinning against Yahweh for so long, the nation had become so thoroughly corrupted by sin that despite two godly kings the exile would still come.

22:1-10 Josiah, the son of Amon, reigned over Judah for thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh following in the ways of David. However, when Josiah began his reign, he was not following Yahweh because he did not know Yahweh in a relational sense. In the eighth year of Josiah's reign he appointed Hilkiah the high priest to take the temple money and begin repairs on the temple. Josiah's actions are intentionally compared with Joash, who also did repairs to the temple well into his reign (2 Kgs. 12). It is the dissimilarities that moves the narrative forward. First Josiah gave the instructions rather than the third-person narrator as in the Joash account. Second it was Josiah's instructions that form the background to the main event, where in the Joash account it is the narrator's instructions that form the background to the main action. During the repairs of the temple, Hilkiah the high priest found the Book of the Law and gave it to Shaphan the secretary, who read it and passed it on to Josiah. The Book of the Law is used only of Deuteronomy (Deut. 28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26; Josh. 1:8; 8:30-35; 23:6; 24:26).

22:11-20 When Josiah had read the Book of the Law, he immediately tore his clothes and mourned. Most likely he was mourning in response to the end of Deuteronomy where Yahweh pronounces judgment on Israel if they abandon their covenant with Him (Deut. 27-28). Josiah's reading of the Book of the Law and turning to Yahweh is an allusion to Deut. 17:20

Josiah then commanded Shaphan the secretary to inquire of Yahweh to find out what must be done in the face of the coming judgment. Hilkiah the high priest and Shaphan the secretary sought out the prophet Huldah. Huldah proclaimed the word of Yahweh that He was going to bring judgment upon Judah because of their idolatry. Yahweh then stated that because Josiah was repentant when he heard read the Book of the Law, the judgment would not come in his lifetime.

23:1-3 Although Josiah would die in peace before the exile, he was not content to rest in his personal reprieve as Hezekiah was (2 Kgs. 20:19). Instead he gathered all the elders, priests, prophets, and people of Jerusalem to the temple and read the Book of the Law to them in one reading and initiated revival. Josiah stood by the pillar (just like Joash) and renewed the covenant with Yahweh, and the people pledged themselves to Yahweh (Deut. 29).

23:4-16 Josiah immediately ordered Hilkiah the high priest to remove and burn the pagan articles made for Baal and Asherah that Manasseh had put in the temple (2 Kgs. 22:4-5). He did away with the idolatrous priests and the temple prostitutes in the temple of Yahweh. Officiating at these sites were priests who burned incense. This action is used in the book of Kings of pagan cult practices (1 Kgs. 12:33; 13:1-2; 2 Kgs. 17:11) and within a Yahwistic context is a common negative assessment (1 Kgs. 22:43; 2 Kgs. 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35; 16:4). He then desecrated all the high places in Judah. The narrator lists many things in detail that Josiah did to remove the land of idolatry. The length and detail of the list communicates the thoroughness of Josiah's cleansing of Judah. The verbs are intense, the reform was rapid, brutal, and total in its reach.

23:15-20 Josiah even moved outside of his kingdom and tore down the altars of Jeroboam in Bethel and Dan and burned the bones of the priests in fulfillment of Yahweh's prophecy (2 Kgs.

13:1-3). The defilement of sowing with human bones renders these locations an abomination and they could never be used again (1 Kgs. 11:5, 7). The bones were ground to dust like the golden calf (Ex. 32:20; Deut. 9:21). The altar of Jeroboam's cult is the focus. It is mentioned four times in 2 Kgs. 23:15-17.

After an initial rush to destroy the hated altar and high place of the golden calf, the narrative backtracks to preceding events. Josiah then inquired of a specific tomb near Bethel, which he was told was the tomb of the man of God that had prophesied against Jeroboam's religion. Josiah left it untouched and began to cleanse the rest of Samaria of idolatry. The fulfillment is clearly emphasized. First Josiah, unnamed since 2 Kgs. 22:3, is now named as the episode begins (2 Kgs. 23:16), as a subtle reminder of Josiah's role in the prophecy. Second the actions are "according to the word of Yahweh." Third the man of God is remembered as "proclaiming" (1 Kgs. 13:2) these things.

23:21-30 Josiah then commanded the celebration of Passover, which had not been celebrated since the days of Joshua (Deut. 16:1-8). Josiah continued to cleanse the land of idolatry and pagan practices all throughout his reign. The narrator's evaluation praises Josiah above all kings and uses the language of Deut. 6:5. However, Yahweh did not change His mind on the coming exile.

Josiah was killed in battle by Neco the Pharaoh of Egypt. That the best king of Judah should end his days in the same way as one of the worst kings indicates the way things were now going. The delay of judgment for Jerusalem and its kings was at an end. When Josiah died, he was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz (2 Kgs. 23:31-35).

C. The Final Years of Judah (23:31-25:30)

Even though Judah had more righteous kings than Israel, in the end they were just as corrupt and would go into exile just like Israel before them. This section shows that no matter how many times kings repent and turn back to Yahweh eventually humanity returns to their wicked behavior and rebellion against Yahweh. It is also in this section that the Babylonian empire comes onto the scene and carries Judah into exile.

23:31-35 Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, reigned over Judah for three months. Jehoahaz is the throne name of Shallum (Jer. 22:11), appointed by the “people of the land” over his older brothers (1 Chr. 3:15). He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh. He probably continued the anti-Egyptian policy of his father, as this would account for his rapid removal and imprisonment by Neco. He eventually died in prison. Neco made Josiah’s other son Eliakim king and changed his name to Jehoiakim (2 Kgs. 23:36-24:7). Jehoiakim paid Neco his tribute. Neco joined Assyria against Babylon’s advance.

23:36-24:7 Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, reigned over Judah for eleven years. He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh. It is during the reign of Jehoiakim that Nebuchadnezzar II came and put Jerusalem under siege.

In 625 Nabopolassar (625-605 BC) established himself as king of a new dynasty in Babylon. Allying himself with the Medes, he began to conquer the Assyrians, taking one city after another. In 612 BC he conquered Assyria’s capital, Nineveh; however, the Assyrian army was in Harran and had allied themselves with Egypt.

In 605 Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar II led the Babylonian army against the allied forces of Assyria and Egypt. He defeated them at Carchemish in the north-west part of Mesopotamia. This victory brought the Assyrian empire to an end and gave Babylon supremacy in the Near East.

In the same year, Nabopolassar died, and Nebuchadnezzar II succeeded him as king. Nebuchadnezzar II then moved south and invaded Judah in 605 BC. During this invasion he took some royal and noble captives to Babylon including Daniel (Dan. 1:1-3) and some of the vessels from Solomon’s temple (2 Chr. 36:7). This was the first of Judah’s three deportations in which the Babylonians took groups of Judahites to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar II made Judah his puppet nation and Jehoiakim his vassal king. But in his third year Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar II, which disobeyed the command that Yahweh spoke through Jeremiah to not oppose Babylon. When Jehoiakim died, he was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin (2 Kgs. 24:8-17).

Jehoiakim’s death includes no mention of his burial and even the textual evidence regarding his fate is ambiguous. 2 Chr. 36:6-7 and Dan. 1:1-7 indicate that he lived through Jerusalem’s fall. 2 Kgs. 24:6, 8 puts his three-month rule after his father’s death and before the fall of Jerusalem. A possible solution is a co-regency during the final three-months before Jerusalem’s fall. 2 Chronicles does not actually state that Jehoiakim was deported.⁸²

24:8-17 Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, reigned over Judah for three months. Jehoiachin is the throne name of Jeconiah (Jer. 24:1; 28:4; 29:2). He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh.

⁸² See Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 518.

During Jehoiachin's reign Nebuchadnezzar came a second time (597 BC) and laid siege to Jerusalem and Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar II. Nebuchadnezzar II took Jehoiachin prisoner and many others from Judah as captives, including Ezekiel. Babylon did not practice two-way deportation, but only deported the population's elites and skilled people, leaving only the poorest of the land (2 Kgs. 24:14; 25:22). The authority of Babylon is implied in that Jehoiachin is the subject of only one verse in 2 Kgs. 24:10-17 and Nebuchadnezzar II has many verses. The juxtaposition shows that Babylon had complete control over Judah and its monarchy. Nebuchadnezzar II made Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah king and changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kgs. 24:18-25:7).

24:18-20 Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, reigned over Judah for eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh. It was during the reign of Zedekiah that Yahweh brought the Babylonians against Judah. The fall of Judah began with the rebellion of Zedekiah against Babylon, which was against Yahweh's will. No date is given for the rebellion, although biblical clues suggest it began early in Zedekiah's reign. Jeremiah portrays the king as a weak leader, vacillating between commitment and rebellion against Babylon (Jer. 21, 27, 32-34, 37-39).

25:1-7 In Zedekiah's ninth year (588 BC) Nebuchadnezzar II came back a third time and put Jerusalem under siege for three years. In 586 BC Babylon broke through the city wall and Zedekiah and his army fled but he was caught. He was then taken to Nebuchadnezzar II who was Riblah, a military administrative center previously used by Assyria (2 Kgs. 23:33). Nebuchadnezzar II killed Zedekiah's sons, blinded him, and carried him off to Babylon in shackles. Zedekiah was succeeded by no one.

25:8-26 Nebuchadnezzar II then came to Jerusalem and burned down the temple, the palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem. He then deported the people of Jerusalem to Babylon, leaving only the poor. Along with the people he carried away all the valuables from the temple. The events are narrated in greater detail in Jer. 40:7-41:18.

Nebuchadnezzar II then appointed Gedaliah as governor. Gedaliah was a nobleman whose father served Josiah (2 Kgs. 22:12; Jer. 26:24) and whose grandfather was Josiah's scribe (2 Kgs. 22:8). Jeremiah's loyalty to Gedaliah (Jer. 40:1-6) suggest the two similarly supported the Babylonian incursion as Yahweh's will and that both urged surrendering to Babylon. Gedaliah was then assassinated by anti-Babylonian Judahites, who then fled to Egypt. By voluntarily returning to Egypt, the land of slavery, the people rejected the covenant and the narrator says no more of them.

25:27-30 After Nebuchadnezzar II, Evil-Marduk became king and released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison and sat him in the highest seat of honor. Jehoiachin removed his prison clothes and sat at the banquet table of Evil-Marduk the rest of his life. The amnesty granted captive kings was not an uncommon pardon granted by Babylonian kings.⁸³ Though the book of Kings ends on an extremely negative note of the exile it also ends with a glimmer of hope. There is no announcement of Jehoiachin's death, his clothes were renewed, and he was restored to a banquet table of blessing. Just as the prophets told of the coming exile of Israel and Judah, they also end with the promises of Yahweh's restoration back to the land of blessing. So, the narrator ends, not with the death of the royal line of Judah, but Yahweh's preservation and promise of restoration of the royal line that would lead to Christ.

⁸³ Jones 1984b 649.



Conclusion

Genesis 1-2 clearly established Yahweh as the sovereign Creator of the universe and that all life was responsible to Him as their Creator. Genesis 3-11 showed how humanity, through the fall, was bent as sinners and rebelled against Yahweh. Genesis through Ruth showed how this sovereign Yahweh pursued humanity in His grace with the desire to redeem and restore them. Yet humanity continued to rebel against Him. The book of Samuel showed that true leadership comes through submission to Yahweh as the sovereign king. The book of Kings is the final and most graphic argument that humanity is truly incapable of submitting to the sovereignty and will of Yahweh in order to experience life. As a result, they would always end up in exile and death rather than blessing and life. The book of Kings sets the reader up for the prophets who clearly detail how and why humanity continually sins. Therefore, humanity needed a new heart: a heart that only Yahweh could provide. The prophets lay out the promise for Yahweh's restoration of humanity's heart so that they can be brought out of exile and into the land of blessing with Yahweh. The message of the book of Kings makes the argument that allows one to embrace the prophet's message of humanity's wickedness, the need for a new heart, and Yahweh's promise of restoration and transformation.

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